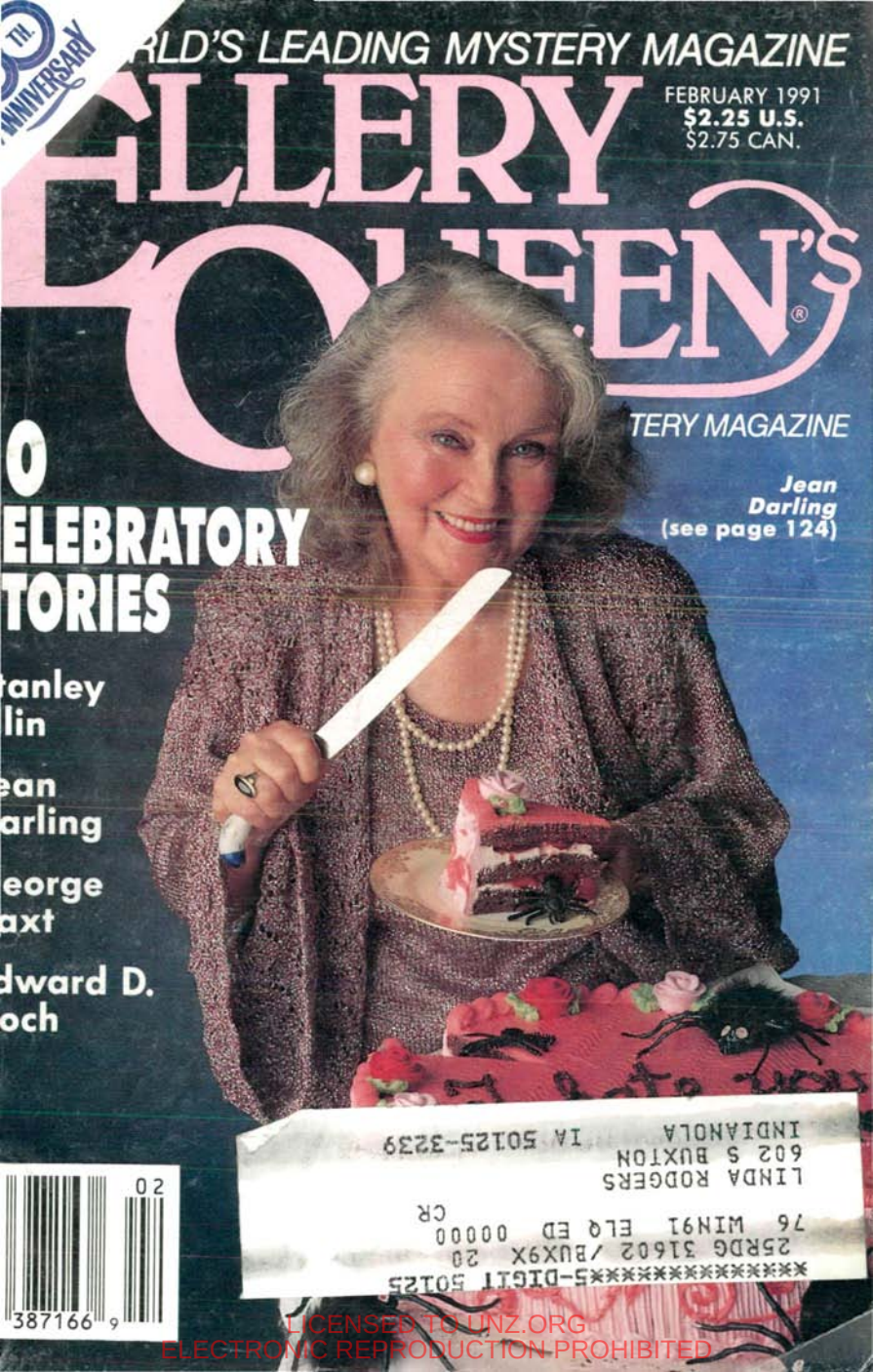
RLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY 1991
$2.25 U.S.
$2.75 CAN.

GLLERY QUEEN'S

TERY MAGAZINE



Jean Darling
(see page 124)

0 ELEBRATORY TORIES

tanley lin

ean arling

eorge axt

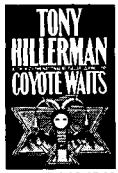
dward D. och

LINDA RODGERS
602 S BUXTON
INDIANOLA IA 50125-3239

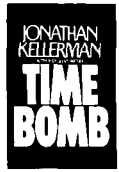
25RDG 31602 /BUX9X 20
76 WIN91 ELQ ED 00000
CR

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

0760 . $18.95/$8.98

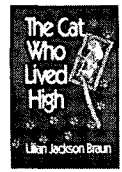


3368 $19.95/$7.98



0075 $19.95/$9.98

0414 $11.98x



0091 $15.95/$7.98

1495 $18.95/$7.98

0471 $18.95/$7.98

DYING FOR A GOOD MYSTERY?

0620 $17.95/$7.98

0034 $18.95/$7.98

0638 $19.95/$8.98

2915 $22.95/$8.98

Take any 6 books for 99¢

when you join *Mystery Guild*

2600 $16.95/$7.98

HERE'S WHAT YOU GET WHEN YOUR MEMBERSHIP IS ACCEPTED . . .

A GUARANTEE OF SATISFACTION. If you're not 100% satisfied with your books, return them within 10 days *at our expense* and owe nothing. The Club Tote is your free gift to keep.

HUGE DISCOUNTS ON HARDCOVER BOOKS. Save as much as 60% off publishers' edition prices. Club books are sometimes altered in size to fit special presses.

THE FREE CLUB MAGAZINE. You'll receive up to 15 issues a year. Each issue reviews the Featured Book Selection(s) plus a wide variety of alternate books from the Club's extensive library.

SHOPPING MADE SIMPLE. To get the Featured Book Selection(s), *do nothing*—it will be sent automatically. If you prefer another book—or none at all—simply return your Member Reply Form by the specified date. A shipping and handling charge is added to each order.

AN EASY-TO-MEET OBLIGATION. Take up to 1 year to buy 4 more books at regular low Club prices. Afterwards, you may resign membership anytime.

RISK-FREE RETURN PRIVILEGES. If you get an unwanted book because your Club magazine was delayed and you had less than 10 days to respond, simply return the book *at our expense.*

Prices in fine print are for publishers' hardcover editions.
Prices in bold print are for Club hardcover editions.

x Hardcover edition exclusively for Club members
* Explicit scenes and/or language

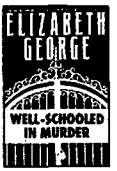
FREE TOTE with membership

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

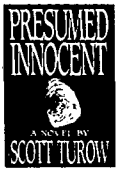
3376 $18.95/$7.98

2089 $18.95/$7.98

6551 $17.95/$7.98



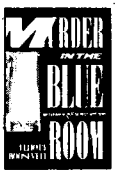
6544 $17.95/$7.98



*2352 $18.95/$7.98

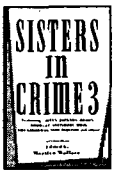
7385 $8.98x

1115 $15.95/$7.98



3061 $16.95/$7.98

0315 $19.95/$7.98



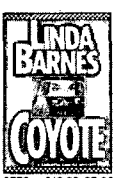
2655 $8.98x

*9852 $19.95/$11.98

6494 $17.95/$6.98

1818 $18.95/$8.98

8174 $17.95/$8.98

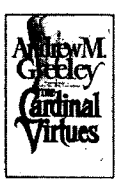


0778 $18.95/$7.98

0406 $18.95/$7.98

8011 $16.95/$7.98

0588 $19.95/$11.98



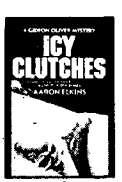
0562 $19.95/$11.98

*0166 $18.95/$10.98

6577 *$25.00/$12.98

9886 $19.95/$11.98

0372 $19.95/$8.98



0653 $16.95/$7.98

MYSTERY GUILD

MAIL TO: *Mystery Guild*, 6550 East 30th Street
P.O. Box 6362, Indianapolis, IN 46206-6362

Please write book numbers here:

YES! Please enroll me in *Mystery Guild* according to the risk-free membership plan described in this ad. Send me the 6 BOOKS I've indicated—plus my FREE CLUB TOTE. Bill me just 99¢, plus shipping and handling.

SAVE MORE—BUY YOUR FIRST BOOK NOW FOR $2.49!
☐ Send me the book I've indicated and reduce my commitment to only 3 more books. Bill me just $2.49, plus shipping and handling.

(write book number)

17948 20

17949 22

Mr./Mrs.
Miss/Ms. _____
please print

Address _____ Apt. _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members serviced from Canada, where offer is slightly different. Sales tax added where applicable. We reserve the right to reject any application. EQM 2/91

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Contents

THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ELLERY QUEEN®

The House Party	Stanley Ellin	**4**
EQMM 50th Anniversary Contest		**24**
The Comeback	William Bankier	**26**
Final Payment	Donald Olson	**42**
The President of the United States, Detective	H. F. Heard	**53**
Unreasonable Facsimile	George Baxt	**80**
The Jury Box	Jon L. Breen	**90**
The Two Senoras	Richard Patrick Gibbons	**93**
A Little Game	Martin Werner	**103**
Jungle Land	David Dean	**109**
I Never Saw His Face	Jean Darling	**124**
The Edge of the Year 1900	Edward D. Hoch	**137**

On our cover is JEAN DARLING

Cover Photograph by Peter Papadopolous

Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Note: indicia on page 159

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Send for FREE FACTS

Train at home for a better career
49 ways ICS can help improve your life

Get Your Specialized Associate Degree or Career Diploma at Home in Spare Time

The decision to invest time, energy and money in preparing for a new career is not an easy one. Yet it may be the most important decision you will ever make. It can offer you the opportunity to qualify for the job you want...more money, more prestige, a better way of life.

At ICS we've spent more than one hundred years training people for exciting, profitable careers. Since 1890 more than 10,000,000 students have enrolled with us and over 2,000 major corporations have chosen the ICS training system for their own employees!

No Need to Attend Technical School, College or University

If you've always wanted your Specialized Associate Degree, now you can get it without ever setting foot on a college campus! Or if specialized career training is your goal, now you can have that, too...no need to attend trade or technical school. Home study makes it possible to get the education you want, yet never quit your job or change your lifestyle. You study at home, the hours you choose...go as fast or slow as you like.

And our lessons make it easy because they're clearly written and include drawings, diagrams and photos. Tools, calculators, electronic instruments, computers, drawing materials, fabric swatches, reference books... whatever you need to complete your training is included with your program at no extra cost!

CALL TOLL FREE

1-800-228-5300 Dept. ADRS11S

CALL ANYTIME—Operators to take your call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

OR MAIL COUPON TODAY.

ICS SINCE 1890 Over 100 Years of Excellence

International Correspondence Schools, Dept. ADRS11S
925 Oak Street, Scranton, Pennsylvania 18515

Please send me free facts, color brochure and full information on how I can train at home for the career I have chosen. I understand I am under no obligation and no salesman will visit me. **CHECK ONE BOX ONLY.**

ASSOCIATE IN SPECIALIZED BUSINESS DEGREE PROGRAMS

- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Accounting
- ☐ *Business Management with option in Finance*
- ☐ Business Management with option in Marketing
- ☐ Applied Computer Science
- ☐ Hospitality Management

ASSOCIATE IN SPECIALIZED TECHNOLOGY DEGREE PROGRAMS

- ☐ Civil Engineering Technology
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering Technology
- ☐ *Electrical Engineering Technology*
- ☐ Industrial Engineering Technology
- ☐ Electronics Technology

828ZC

CAREER DIPLOMA PROGRAMS

- ☐ Computer Programming
- ☐ Computer Programming/COBOL
- ☐ Personal Computer Specialist
- ☐ Computer-Assisted Bookkeeping
- ☐ High School
- ☐ Catering/Gourmet Cooking
- ☐ Medical/Dental Office Assistant
- ☐ Microcomputer Repair
- ☐ Auto Mechanics
- ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Hotel/Restaurant Mgmt.
- ☐ Drafting
- ☐ Animal Care Specialist
- ☐ Travel Agent
- ☐ Air Conditioning & Refrigeration
- ☐ Electronics
- ☐ Secretary
- ☐ Electrician
- ☐ Police Sciences
- ☐ Private Security Officer
- ☐ Art
- ☐ Small Business Mgmt.
- ☐ Interior Decorating
- ☐ TV/VCR Repair
- ☐ Child Day Care
- ☐ Wildlife/Forestry Conservation
- ☐ Legal Secretary
- ☐ Diesel Mechanics
- ☐ Fashion Merchandising
- ☐ Gun Repair
- ☐ Motorcycle Repair
- ☐ Surveying & Mapping
- ☐ Fitness & Nutrition
- ☐ Legal Assistant
- ☐ Photography
- ☐ Journalism/Short Story Writing
- ☐ Dressmaking & Design
- ☐ Starting Your Own Business

NAME_____ AGE_____

ADDRESS_____ APT. #_____

CITY/STATE_____ ZIP_____

PHONE ( )_____

A Subsidiary of National Education Corporation

LICENSED TO UNL.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ISSUE #579—DEDICATED TO STANLEY ELLIN

In his commentary on Stanley Ellin in Twentieth Century Crime and Mystery Writers, *Edward D. Hoch wrote, "Stanley Ellin's career has been blessed with a first story that everyone remembers and many consider the finest of the three dozen or so short stories he's produced in the past thirty-odd years. But even without 'The Specialty of the House,' Ellin would be one of the modern masters of the genre, with a reputation built firmly upon novels and some of the most imaginative stories in the mystery-suspense field."*

"The Specialty of the House" was, of course, published in EQMM's Department of First Stories—in the May 1948 issue. We would include it in this issue were it not so widely anthologized and therefore more readily available. We are reprinting instead his intriguing "The House Party," also a classic, which won him his first of three Edgars from the Mystery Writers of America (two in the short-story category, one in the novel).

When he was duly honored with that organization's Grand Master Award in 1981, Dorothy Salisbury Davis recollected in the Mystery Writers Annual:

"It was in the mid-1950s that C. P. Snow's new American publisher proposed to give a cocktail party for him and asked him whom he would like to invite. Mr. Snow—he was still called mister in those days—said it didn't matter at all, ask the usual lot for those things. Then, doubling his chin, or tripling it, that distinguished gentleman and literary figure mumbled, 'There is a chap I'd like to meet. Best short-story writer around today, name of Stanley Ellin. Lives in Brooklyn.' "

Reviewing one of our favorite novels by Stanley Ellin, The Dark Fantastic, *in the* Los Angeles Times, *Charles Champlin pointed out, "Less widely known than Ed McBain and other crime writers, Ellin is something of a cult figure, particularly for his short stories that have been the basis for films by Joseph Losey, Claude Chabrol, and Clive Donner. His 1967 novel,* House of Cards, *was filmed in 1968, directed by John Guillerman." There have been other memorable films made of his work as well.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Stanley was guest of honor at Bouchercon VIII in 1977, held at New York's Waldorf-Astoria. The program pointed out his birthplace as Brooklyn (1916), where he still lived with his wife Jeanne when he died in 1986. In the Bouchercon program he was quoted as saying Jeanne "is a brilliant, remorseless, and objective critic." Jeanne and Stanley have a married daughter, Susan. Their grandchild, Tai, appeared on the September 1987 cover of EQMM.

In the introduction to his story, "The Best of Everything," in the September 1952 issue of EQMM, there is the following Stan Ellin self-portrait: "A figure of average height and disproportionate girth, he reveals a striking resemblance to an Alaskan brown bear who has been preparing himself for a hard winter. Seen close up, he gives the curiously unfinished appearance of an Epstein sculpture. These impressions are belied only by a pair of liquid brown eyes, and a pair of extremely sensitive hands capable of cutting to the ace of spades on demand."

How we loved his style. How we loved him . . .

"Ellin belongs to the select company that includes Roald Dahl and John Collier."—Anthony Boucher

"And so you know what to expect from Stanley Ellin. Solidity and substance—solidity and texture in his style, substance and imagination in his plots."—Ellery Queen

"Anyone who has ever brooded over the disappearance of Ambrose Bierce, Judge Crater, and others under mysterious conditions will find this story of the greatest import."—Stanley Ellin in his cover letter on submission of "The Specialty of the House" to EQMM . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE HOUSE PARTY

by STANLEY ELLIN

"*He's coming around,*" *said the voice.*

He was falling. His hands were outflung against the stone-cold blackness of space, and his body tilted head over heels, heels over head as he fell. If there were only a way of knowing what was below, of bracing himself against the moment of impact, the terror might not have been so great. This way he was no more than a lump of terror flung into a pit, his mind cowering away from the inevitable while his helpless body descended toward it.

"Good," the voice said from faraway, and it sounded to him as if someone were speaking to him quite calmly and cheerfully from the bottom of the pit. "Very good."

He opened his eyes: A glare of light washed in on him suddenly and painfully, and he squinted against it at the figures standing around him, at the faces, partly obscured by a sort of milky haze, looking down at him. He was lying on his back, and from the thrust of the cushions under him he knew he was on the familiar sofa. The milky haze was fading away now, and with it the panic. This was the old house at Nyack, the same living room, the same Utrillo on the wall, the same chandelier glittering over his head. The same everything, he thought bitterly, even to the faces around him.

That was Hannah, her eyes bright with tears—she could turn on tears like a faucet—and her hand was gripping his so hard that his fingers were numb under the pressure. Hannah with the overdeveloped maternal instinct, and only a husband to exercise it on . . . That was Abel Roth chewing on a cigar—even at a time like this, that reeking cigar—and watching him worriedly. Abel with his first successful production in five years, worrying about his investment . . . And that was Ben Thayer and Harriet, the eternal bumpkins . . . And Jake Hall . . . And Tommy McGowan . . . All the old familiar faces, the sickening familiar faces.

But there was a stranger, too. A short stout man with a look of amiable interest on his face, and splendidly bald, with only a tonsure of greying hair to frame his gleaming scalp. He ran his fingers reflectively over his scalp and nodded at Miles.

© 1954 by Stanley Ellin. Reprinted by permission of Curtis Brown Ltd.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"How do you feel now?" he asked.

"I don't know," Miles said. He pulled his hand free of Hannah's and gingerly tried to raise himself to a sitting position. Halfway there, he was transfixed by a shocking pain that was driven like a white-hot needle between his ribs. He heard Hannah gasp, and then the stranger's blunt fingers were probing deep into the pain, turning it to liquid, melting it away.

"See?" the man said. "It's nothing. Nothing at all."

Miles swung his legs around so that he sat erect on the sofa. He took a deep breath, then another. "For a second I thought it was my heart," he said. "The way it hit me—"

"No, no," the man said. "I know what you thought. You can believe me when I say it is of no concern." And then, as if it explained everything, he said, "I am Dr. Maas. Dr. Victor Maas."

"It was a miracle, darling," Hannah said breathlessly. "Dr. Maas was the one who found you outside and brought you in. And he's been an absolute angel. If it weren't for him—"

Miles looked at her, and then looked at all the others standing there and watching him with concern. "Well," he demanded, "what *did* happen? What was it? Heart? Stroke? Amnesia? I'm not a child, for God's sake. You don't have to play games with me."

Abel Roth rolled his cigar from the left-hand corner of his mouth to the right-hand corner. "You can't blame him for feeling that way, can you, Doc? After all, the man is out cold for fifteen minutes, he wants to know where he stands. Maybe there's some kind of checkup you could give him, like blood pressure and stuff like that. Maybe we'd all feel better for it."

Miles relished that, and relished even more the thought of what he had in store for Abel Roth. "Maybe we would, Abel," he said. "Maybe we've got a theater sold out sixteen weeks in advance, and the SRO sign up every night. Maybe we've got a real little gold mine to dig so long as I can keep swinging the shovel eight performances a week."

Abel's face turned red. "Ah, now, Miles," he said. "The way you talk—"

"Yes?" Miles said. "What about the way I talk?"

Ben Thayer shook his head slowly and solemnly. "If you'd only take the chip off your shoulder for one minute, Miles," he drawled. "If you'd try to understand—"

"Please!" Dr. Maas said sharply. "Gentlemen, please!" He frowned at them. "There is one thing I must make clear. Actually, I am not

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a medical physician. My interests, so to speak, lie more in the field of psychiatrics, and while I am, perhaps, qualified to make the examination of Mr. Owen that you suggest, I have no intention of doing so. For Mr. Owen's benefit I will also say that there is no need for me or anyone else to do so. He has my word on that."

"And Dr. Maas, I am sure," said Miles, "is an honorable man." He stood up, flexing his knees gingerly and noting the relief on the faces around him. "If you want to make yourself at home, Doctor, go right ahead. There seems to be some kind of buffet over there, and while I can't vouch for the food I can promise that the liquor is very, very good."

The doctor's grin gave him a surprising resemblance to a plump and mischievous boy. "A delightful suggestion," he said, and immediately made his way toward the buffet. Abel followed, and Miles observed, before the doctor had even reached the buffet, the cigar was perilously close to his ear. Abel spent three hours a week on a psychoanalyst's couch, and at least as much time pouring out lists of frightening and inconsequential symptoms to a sleek and well fed Park Avenue practitioner. Dr. Maas, Miles thought with a wry sympathy, was in for some heavy going, whether he knew it or not.

The rest of the circle around the sofa broke up and eddied off, until only Hannah was left. She caught his arm in a panicky grip.

"Are you *sure* you're all right?" she demanded. "You know you can tell me if there's anything wrong."

There was something wrong. Every time she caught hold of him like that, tried to draw him close, he had the feeling of a web ensnaring him, closing over him so that he had to fight it savagely.

It had not been like that at the start. She had been so beautiful that he thought in her case it might be different. The rising together, the eating together, the talking together, the endless routine of marriage looked as if it might somehow be bearable as long as it was shared with that loveliness. But then after a year the loveliness had become too familiar, the affection too cloying, the routine too much of a crushing burden.

He had been unconscious for fifteen minutes. He wondered if he had babbled during that time, said something about Lily that could be seized on as a clue. It wasn't of much concern if he had; in fact, it might have been a good way of preparing Hannah for the blow. It was going to be quite a blow, too. He could picture it falling, and it wasn't a pleasant picture.

He shrugged off Hannah's hand. "There's nothing wrong," he said,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and then could not resist adding, "unless it's this business of your throwing a house party the one time of the week when I might expect a little peace and quiet."

"I?" Hannah said uncertainly. "What did *I* have to do with it?"

"Everything, as long as you've got that damn yen to be the perfect hostess and everybody's friend."

"They're *your* friends," Hannah said, "not mine."

"You ought to know by now that they're not my friends, either. I thought I made it clear a hundred different ways that I hate them all, individually and collectively. They're nobody's friends. Why is it my obligation to feed them and entertain them the one time of the week I can get rid of them?"

"I don't understand you," Hannah said. She looked as if she were about to break into tears. "I know you bought the house up here so you could get away from everybody, but you were the one—"

The web was closing in again. "All *right*," he said. "All *right!*"

The whole thing didn't matter, anyhow. After he cleared out she could throw a house party every night of the week if she wanted to. She could burn the damn house down if that suited her. It wasn't of any concern to him. He'd had enough of this country-squire life between every Saturday and Monday performance to last him the rest of his life, and, as Lily had once remarked, Central Park had all the trees she wanted to see. Just the realization that he would soon be packed and out of here made any arguments pointless.

He shouldered his way to the buffet past Bob and Liz Gregory, who were mooning at each other as if doing it on the radio six mornings a week wasn't enough; past Ben Thayer, who was explaining to Jake Hall the trouble he was having with the final act of his new play; past Abel, who was saying something to Dr. Maas about psychosomatic factors. The doctor had a tall glass in one hand and a sandwich in the other. "Interesting," he was saying. "Very interesting."

Miles tried to close his ears to all of them as he poured down two fingers of bourbon. Then he looked at his glass with distaste. The stuff was as flat as warm water, and as unpleasant to the palate. Obviously one of the local help who took turns cleaning up the house had found the key to the liquor cabinet and, after nearly emptying the bottle, had done a job on it at the kitchen tap. Damn fool. If you're going to sneak a drink, do it and forget it. But to ruin the rest of the bottle this way—

Abel poked him in the ribs. "I was just telling the doctor here,"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Abel said, "if he gets an evening off I'll fix him up with a house seat for *Ambuscade*. I was telling him, if he hasn't seen Miles Owen in *Ambuscade* he hasn't seen the performance of all time. How does that sound to you, Miles?"

Miles was lifting another bottle after making sure its seal was unbroken. He looked at Abel and then set the bottle down with great care. "As a matter of fact," he said, "I don't know how it sounds to me, Abel. It's something I've wanted to talk to you about and maybe this is as good a time as any."

"Talk about what?" said Abel cheerfully, but there was a sudden worry in his eyes, a flickering of premonition on his face.

"It's private business, Abel," Miles said, and nodded to Dr. Maas, who stood by interestedly. "That is, if the doctor will excuse us."

"Of course, of course," the doctor said quickly. He waved his glass enthusiastically toward Miles. "And you were altogether right about the liquor, Mr. Owen. It is superb."

"Fine," Miles said. "This way, Abel."

He pushed his way through the crowd and crossed the room to the library, Abel trailing after him.

When he closed the door of the library and switched on a lamp, the chill dampness of the room seemed to soak right into him, and he shivered. Logs and kindling had been laid on the fireplace, and he held a match to it until the wood crackled and caught. Then he lit a cigarette and drew deeply on it. He looked at the cigarette in surprise. There was a flatness about it, a lack of sensation which made him run his tongue over his lips questioningly. He drew again on the cigarette, and then flung it into the fire. First the liquor, he thought, and now this. Dr. Maas might be a handy man with Freudian complexes, but the first thing Monday an honest-to-God M.D. would be checking up on this little problem. It is discomforting to find out suddenly that you've lost your capacity to taste anything. Ridiculous maybe, but still discomforting.

Abel was standing at the window. "Look at that fog, will you. When I brought *Coxcomb* over to London I thought I saw the real thing there, but this makes it look like nothing. You could cut your way through this with a shovel."

The fog was banked solidly outside the window, stirring in slow waves, sending threads of damp smoke against the glass. Where the threads clung, little beads of water trickled down the pane.

"You get that around here a couple of times a year," Miles said impatiently. "And I didn't come in here to talk about the weather."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Abel turned away from the window and sat down reluctantly in an armchair. "No, I guess you didn't. All right, Miles, what's bothering you?"

"*Ambuscade,*" Miles said. "*Ambuscade* is what's bothering me."

Abel nodded wearily. "It figured. It figured. Well, what particular thing? Your billing? We're using the biggest letters they make. Your publicity? All you have to do is name the time and you have your pick of any TV or radio guest spot in town. Remember what I told you after opening night, Miles? You name it, and if I can get it for you, I will."

Miles found himself suddenly enjoying the scene. Ordinarily, he had a genuine horror of such scenes. "Funny," he said. "I didn't hear you say anything about money just now, did I? I mean, in all that pretty speech it couldn't have slipped past me, could it?"

Abel sank down in his chair and sighed like a man deeply stricken. "I thought it would come down to this. Even if I'm paying you twice as much as the biggest star I ever had, I could see it coming, Miles. All right, what's the beef?"

"As a matter of fact," Miles said, "there's no beef."

"No?"

"None at all."

"What are you getting at?" Abel demanded. "What's all this about?"

Miles smiled. "I'm not getting *at* anything, Abel. I'm getting *out.* I'm leaving the show."

Miles had seen Abel meet more than one crisis before; he could have predicted every action before it took place. The face becoming an impassive mask, the hand searching for a match, the thumbnail flicking the match into a light, the elaborate drawing on the cigar stump, the neat flick of the match across the room. Abel fooled him. The match was snapped with sudden violence between the fingers, and then slowly rolled back and forth, back and forth.

"You're a cute boy, Miles," Abel said. "This wouldn't be your idea of a joke, would it?"

"I'm getting out, Abel. Tonight was positively the last appearance. That gives you all day tomorrow to line up another boy for the Monday-night curtain."

"What other boy?"

"Well, you've got Jay Welker on tap, haven't you? He's been understudying for me for five months, and hoping I'd break a leg every night of it."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Jay Welker couldn't carry *Ambuscade* one week, and you know it, Miles. Nobody can carry that show but you, and you know that, too." Abel leaned forward in his chair and shook his head from side to side unbelievingly. "And knowing that, you don't give a damn. You'd close the biggest thing on Broadway just like that, and to hell with the whole world, is that it?"

Miles felt his heart starting to pound heavily, his throat tightening. "Wait a second, Abel, before you start on the dirty words. One thing has already come through pretty well. In all this, you haven't yet asked me why I'm leaving. For all you know I might have some condition that's going to kill me an hour from now, but that would bother you less than keeping your show running! Have you thought about that side of it?"

"What side of it? I was standing right there when the doctor said you were in good shape. What am I supposed to do now? Get affidavits from the American Medical Association?"

"Then it's your idea that I'm pulling out because of a whim?"

"Let's not kid each other, Miles. You did this to Barrow five years ago, you did it to Goldschmidt after that, you did it to Howie Freeman last year, and I know, because that's how I got my chance to grab you for *Ambuscade*. But all the time I figured these others didn't know how to handle you, they didn't see just how much you meant to a show. Now I tell you they were right all along, and I was a prize sucker. They told me you would be going along fine, and then all of a sudden you would get a bug in your ear, and that was it. Bug in your ear, Miles. That's my low, ignorant way of saying whim, which is what it adds up to."

Abel paused. "The difference between me and them, Miles, is that I didn't take chances, and that's why you signed the first run-of-the-play contract you ever got since you were a nobody. You think you're walking out on that contract? Think again, my friend."

Miles nodded. "All right," he said thickly, "I'm thinking. Do you want to know about what?"

"They're your dice, my friend."

"I'm thinking about eight performances a week, Abel. Eight times a week I say the same lines, walk the same steps, make the same faces. I've done it for five months, which is the biggest break you ever got in your life, but if you had your way I'd be doing it for five years! Right now it's turned into one of those nightmares where you do the same thing over and over without being able to stop, but you wouldn't know about that because *you're* a guy in love with routine!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But *I'm* not! After a while it's like being in jail with the key thrown away. What do you tell a man when he can walk out of jail? To stay there and like it?"

"Jail!" Abel cried. "Tell me somebody in this country who wouldn't give his right eye to be in the kind of jail you're in! What the hell kind of talk is that?"

"Listen," Miles said. He leaned forward urgently. "Do you remember before the show opened when we were rehearsing that kitchen scene? Do you remember when we ran through it that night ten times, fifteen times, twenty times? Do you know how I felt then? I felt as if I was plunked right down in hell, and all I would do for eternity was just play that scene over and over again. That's my idea of hell, Abel: a sweet little place where you do the same thing over and over, and they won't even let you go nuts at it, because that would spoil the fun for them. Do you get that? Because if you do, you can see just how I feel about *Ambuscade!*"

"I get it," Abel said. "I also get a certain little run-of-the-play contract tucked away in my safe-deposit box. If you think rehearsing a scene a few times is hell, you'll find out different when Equity lands on you. They look at this a little different from you."

"Don't try to scare me, Abel."

"Scare you, hell. I'm going to sue you black and blue, and I'm going to make it stick. I'm dead serious about that, Miles."

"Maybe. But isn't it hard to sue a man who's too sick to work?"

Abel nodded with grim understanding. "I figured you'd get around to that angle. I'm the patsy, because to the rest of the world you're sick." His eyes narrowed. "And that explains something else, too. That little business of your little blackout on the front doorstep, with a doctor handy, and twenty witnesses to swear to it. I have to hand it to you, Miles, you don't miss a trick. Only it'll take more than a smart trick and a quack doctor to work things your way."

Miles choked down his rage. "If you think that was a trick—!"

"What was a trick?" Harriet Thayer's voice said gaily behind him. Harriet and Ben were standing in the doorway, regarding him with a sort of cheerful curiosity. They made an incongruous couple, Ben's gauntness towering high over Harriet's little-girl fragility, and they had an eager, smalltown friendliness that grated on Miles's nerves like a fingernail drawn down a slate. "It sounds terribly exciting and interesting," Harriet said. "Don't let us stop you."

Abel pointed at Miles with a shaking forefinger. "This'll stop you all right," he said, "and I'll give it to you in one line. Our friend here

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is walking out on *Ambuscade*. Maybe *you* can do something to change his mind!"

Ben stared with slow incredulity, and Miles had to marvel, as he had done so many times before, that any man who could write even the few good lines to be found in *Ambuscade* could be so slow on his feet.

"But you can't," Ben said. "I mean, your contract runs as long as the play does."

"Sure," Abel jeered, "but he's a sick man. He falls down and has fits. You saw him, didn't you?"

Harriet nodded dumbly. "Yes, but I never thought—"

"And you were right," Abel said. "He's faking it. He's just fed up with making all that money and having all those nice things printed about him, so he's going to close the show. That's all. Just fold it up tight."

Miles slammed his hand down hard on the arm of Abel's chair. "All right," he said, "now that you've made everything so clear I'll ask you something. Do you think if *Ambuscade* was really a good play that any one person could close it up? Did it ever strike you that no one comes to see your crummy play; they come to see me walk through it? If you gave me *Jabberwocky* to read up there they'd come to see me! Who's to tell a one-man show that he has to keep playing when he doesn't want to!"

"It *is* a good play!" Harriet shouted at him. "It's the best play you ever acted in, and if you don't know that—"

Miles was shouting himself now. "Then get someone else to play it! It might be even better that way!"

Ben held his hands out, palms up, in a pleading gesture. "Now, Miles, you know you've been identified with that part so no one else could take it over," he said. "And try to see it my way, Miles. I've been writing fifteen years, and this is the first real break—"

Miles walked up to him slowly. "You clown," he said softly. "Don't you have any self-respect at all?"

When he walked out of the library, he quickly slammed the door behind him to forestall any belated answer to that.

The party had broken into several small knots of people scattered around the room, a deafening rise and fall of voices, a haze of blue smoke which lay like a transparent blanket midway between floor and ceiling. Someone, Miles observed, had overturned a drink on the piano; the puddle ran down in a glittering string along the side

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the mahogany and was leaving a damp stain on the Wilton rug beneath. Tommy McGowan and his latest, an overripe blonde—Norma or Alma or something—sat on the floor shuffling through piles of phonograph records, arranging some into a dangerously high stack and carelessly tossing the others aside. The buffet looked as if a cyclone had hit it; only some empty platters and broken pieces of bread remained amidst the wreckage. From the evidence, Miles thought sardonically, the party would have to be rated a roaring success.

But even the sense of heat and excitement in the room could not erase the chill that he seemed to have brought with him from the library. He rubbed his hands together hard, but this didn't help any, and he felt a small pang of fright at the realization. What if there really were something wrong with him? Lily wasn't the kind of woman to take gracefully to the role of nursemaid to an invalid. Not that she was wrong about that, as far as he was concerned; if the shoe were on the other foot he couldn't see himself playing any Robert Browning to her Elizabeth Barrett, either. Not for Lily or anyone else in the world. In that case, it was better not to even bother about a checkup. If there was something, he didn't even want to know about it!

"You are disturbed about something, I think."

It was Dr. Maas. He was leaning casually against the wall not an arm's length away, his hands thrust into his pockets, his eyes fixed reflectively on Miles. Taking in everything, Miles thought angrily, like some damn scientist looking at a bug under a microscope.

"No," Miles snapped. Then he thought better of it. "Yes," he said. "As a matter of fact, I am."

"Ah?"

"I don't feel right. I know you told me I was fine, but I don't feel that way."

"Physically?"

"Of course, physically! What are you trying to tell me? That it's all in my mind, or some claptrap like that?"

"I am not trying to tell you anything, Mr. Owen. You are telling me."

"All right. Then I want to know what makes you so sure of yourself. No examination, no X-ray, no anything, and you come up with your answer just like that. What's the angle here? Do we somehow get around to the idea that there's nothing wrong physically, but if I put myself in your hands for a nice long expensive psychoanalysis—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Stop right there, Mr. Owen," Dr. Maas said coldly. "I will take for granted that your manners are abominable because you are clearly under some pressure. But you should rein in your imagination. I do not practice psychoanalysis, and I never said I did. I am not a healer of any sort. The people I deal with are, unfortunately, always past the point of any cure, and my interest in them, as you can see, must be wholly academic. To be taken for some kind of sharper seeking a victim—"

"Look," Miles said abruptly, "I'm sorry. I'm terribly sorry. I don't know what made me go off like that. Maybe it's this party. I hate these damn parties; they always do things to me. Whatever it is, I'm honestly sorry for taking it out on you."

The doctor nodded gravely. "Of course," he said. "Of course." Then he nervously ran his fingers over his shining scalp. "There is something else I should like to say. I am afraid, however, I would risk offending you."

Miles laughed. "I think you owe it to me."

The doctor hesitated, and then gestured toward the library. "As it happens, Mr. Owen, I heard much of what went on in there. I am not an eavesdropper, but the discussion got a little—well, heated shall we say?—and it was impossible not to overhear it from outside the door here."

"Yes?" Miles said warily.

"The clue to your condition, Mr. Owen, lies in that discussion. To put it bluntly, you are running away. You find what you call routine unbearable, and so you are fleeing from it."

Miles forced himself to smile. "What do you mean, what *I* call routine? Is there another word for it in your language?"

"I think there is. I think I would call it responsibility. And since your life, Mr. Owen—both your profession and your private life—is very much an open book to the world, I will draw on it and say that most of this life has also been spent fleeing from responsibility of one sort or another. Does it strike you as strange, Mr. Owen, that no matter how far and fast you run you always find yourself facing the same problem over and over again?"

Miles clenched and unclenched his fist. "After all," he said, "it's my problem."

"That is where you're wrong, Mr. Owen. When you suddenly leave your role in a play, it affects everyone concerned with that play, and, in turn, everyone concerned with those people. In your relations with women you may move on, but they do not stay motionless,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

either. They move on, too, dangerous to themselves and perhaps to others. Forgive me if I seem sententious, Mr. Owen, but you cannot cast pebbles in the water without sending ripples to the far shore.

"That is why when you say *routine*, it is because you are thinking only of yourself caught in a situation. And when I say *responsibility*, I am thinking of everyone else concerned with it."

"And what's the prescription, Doctor?" Miles demanded. "To stay sunk in a private little hell because if you try to get away you might step on somebody's toes in the process?"

"Get away?" the doctor said in surprise. "Do you really think you can get away?"

"You've got a lot to learn, Doctor. Watch me and see."

"I am watching you, Mr. Owen, and I do see. In a wholly academic way, as I said. It is both fascinating and bewildering to see a man trying to flee, as he calls it, his private little hell, while all the time he is carrying it with him."

Miles's hand was half raised, and then it dropped limp at his side. "In other words, Doctor," he said mockingly, "you're replacing the good old-fashioned sulphur-and-brimstone hell with something even bigger and better."

The doctor shrugged. "Of course, you don't believe that."

"No," Miles said, "I don't."

"I have a confession to make, Mr. Owen." The doctor smiled, and suddenly he was the plump and mischievous boy again. "I knew you wouldn't. In fact, that is why I felt free to discuss the matter with you."

"In a wholly academic way, of course."

"Of course."

Miles laughed. "You're quite a man, Doctor. I think I'd like to see more of you."

"I am sure you will, Mr. Owen. But right now I believe that someone is trying to attract your notice. There, by the door."

Miles followed the doctor's gesturing finger, and his heart stopped. All he could do was pray that no one else had noticed, as he swiftly crossed the room and blocked off the woman who was entering it from the hallway that led to the front door. He thrust her back against the door, and catching hold of her shoulders he shook her once, sharply and angrily.

"Are you crazy?" he demanded. "Don't you have any more sense than to show up here like this?"

She twisted her shoulders away from his grasp and carefully

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

brushed at the collar of her coat with her fingertips. The coat had cost Miles a month's pay.

"Aren't you sweet, Miles. Do you invite all your guests in this way?"

Even in the dimness of the hallway she was startling to look at. The sulky lips against the gardenia pallor of her face, the high cheekbones, the slanted eyes darting fire at him. He quailed.

"All right, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. But, my God, Lily, there are two dozen of the biggest mouths on Broadway in that room. If you want the whole world to know about this, why don't you just tip off Winchell?"

She knew when she had him beaten. "I don't like that, darling. I don't like that at all. I mean, to make it sound as obscene and disgusting as all that. It really isn't supposed to be like that, is it?"

"You know damn well it isn't like that, Lily. But use your head, will you? There is such a thing as discretion."

"There's also such a thing as working a word to death, darling. And I don't mind telling you that in the last two months you've filled me up to here with that one."

Miles said angrily, "I've been trying to make it clear that we'd work this thing out in the right way at the right time. I've already told Abel I was leaving the show. I was going to talk to Hannah, too, but this party has fouled everything up. Tomorrow, when I can be alone with her—"

"Ah, but tomorrow may be a long time away, darling. Much longer than you realize."

"What exactly does that mean?"

She fumbled through her purse and drew an envelope from it. She waved the envelope back and forth under his nose with a fine air of triumph.

"It means this, Miles. Two pretty little reservations, outward bound, for tomorrow's sailing. You see, you don't have nearly as much time as you thought, do you, darling?"

"Tomorrow! The agent said he couldn't possibly have anything for us within a month!"

"He didn't count on cancellations. This one came through just two hours ago, which is exactly how long it took me to get here. And if it wasn't for that awful fog on the road I would have been here that much sooner. I have the car outside, Miles. You can pack whatever is handy and get the rest of what you need on the boat. When I go back I expect you to be with me, Miles, because whether you are or

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not I'll be sailing tomorrow. You can't really blame me for that, can you, darling? After all, none of us are getting any younger."

He tried to straighten out the aching confusion of his thoughts. He wanted to escape Hannah's web, and now it seemed, somehow or other, there was another waiting to be dropped around him. Running, the doctor had said. Always running and never getting anywhere. There was a great weight of weariness in his arms, his legs, his whole body. Running did that to you.

"Well," Lily said, "make up your mind, darling."

He rubbed his hand over his forehead. "Where's the car?"

"Right across the road."

"All right," Miles said, "you wait in it. Just stay there, and don't blow the horn for me or anything like that. I'll be down in ten minutes. Fifteen minutes at the most. Most of my stuff is in town, anyhow. We'll pick it up on the way to the boat."

He opened the door and gently pushed her toward it.

"You'll have to feel your way to the car, Miles. I've never seen anything like what's outside."

"I'll find it," he said. "You just wait there."

He closed the door, then leaned against it, fighting the sickness that kept rising to his throat. The loud voices in the next room, the shrieks of idiot laughter that now and then cut through it, the roar of music from the phonograph tuned at its greatest volume— everything seemed conspiring against him, not allowing him to be alone, not allowing him to think things out.

He went up the stairs almost drunkenly, and into the bedroom. He pulled out his valise, and then at random started cramming it full. Shirts, socks, the contents of the jewel case on his dresser. He thrust down hard with all his weight, making room for more.

"What are you doing, Miles?"

He didn't look up. He knew exactly what the expression on her face would be, and he didn't want to meet it then. It would have been too much.

"I'm leaving, Hannah."

"With that woman?" Her voice was a vague, uncomprehending whisper.

He had to look at her then. Her eyes stared at him, enormous against the whiteness of her skin. Her hand fumbled with the ornament at her breast. It was the silver mask of comedy he had picked up for her on Fifth Avenue a week before their marriage.

She said wonderingly, "I saw you with her in the hallway. I wasn't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

prying or anything like that, Miles, but when I asked the doctor where you were—"

"Stop it!" Miles shouted. "What do you have to apologize for!"

"But she's the one, isn't she?"

"Yes, she's the one."

"And you want to go away with her?"

His hands were on the lid of the valise. He rested his weight on them, head down, eyes closed.

"Yes," he said at last. "That's what it comes to."

"No!" she cried with a sudden fervor. "You don't really want to. You know she's not good for you. You know there's nobody in the whole world as good for you as I am!"

He pressed the lid of the valise down. The lock caught with a tiny click. "Hannah, it would have been better for you not to have come up just now. I would have written to you, explained it somehow—"

"Explained it? When it would be too late? When you'd know what a mistake you made? Miles, listen to me. Listen to me, Miles. I'm talking to you out of all my love. It would be a terrible mistake."

"I'll have to be the judge of that, Hannah."

He stood up, and she came toward him, her fingers digging into his arms frantically. "Look at me, Miles," she whispered. "Can't you see how I feel? Can't you understand that I'd rather have the both of us dead than to have you go away like this and leave the whole world empty for me!"

It was horrible. It was the web constricting around him so hard that it was taking all his strength to pull himself free. But he did, with a brutal effort, and saw her fall back against the dresser. Then she suddenly wheeled toward it, and when she faced him again he saw the pistol leveled at him. It shone a cold, deadly blue in her hand, and then he realized that her hand was trembling so violently that the gun must be frightening her as much as it did him. The whole grotesquerie of the scene struck him full force, melting away the fear, filling him with a sense of outrage.

"Put that thing down," he said.

"No." He could hardly hear her. "Not unless you tell me that you're not going."

He took a step toward her, and she shrank farther back against the dresser, but the gun remained leveled at him. She was like a child afraid someone was going to trick her out of a toy. He stopped short, and then shrugged with exaggerated indifference.

"You're making a fool of yourself, Hannah. People are paid for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

acting like this on the stage. They're not supposed to make private shows of themselves."

Her head moved from side to side in a slow, aimless motion. "You still don't believe me, do you, Miles?"

"No," he said. "I don't."

He turned his back on her, half expecting to hear the sudden explosion, feel the impact between his shoulder blades, but there was nothing. He picked up the valise and walked to the door.

"Goodbye, Hannah," he said. He didn't turn his head to look at her.

The weakness in his knees made each step a trial. He stopped at the foot of the staircase to shift the valise from one hand to the other and saw Dr. Maas standing there, hat in hand, a topcoat thrown over his arm.

"Ah?" said the doctor inquiringly. "So you, too, are leaving the party, Mr. Owen?"

"Party?" Miles said and then laughed short and sharp. "Leaving the nightmare, if you don't mind, Doctor. I hate to tell this to a guest, but I think you'll understand me when I say that this past hour has been a nightmare that gets thicker and thicker. That's what I'm leaving, Doctor, and you can't blame me for being happy about it."

"No, no," said the Doctor. "I quite understand."

"The car is waiting for me outside. If I can give you a lift anywhere?"

"Not at all," the doctor said. "I really do not have far to go."

They went to the doorway together and stepped outside. The fog moved in on them, cold and wet, and Miles turned up his jacket collar against it.

"Rotten weather," he said.

"Terrible," the doctor agreed. He glanced at his watch, and then lumbered down the steps to the walk like a walrus disappearing into a snowbank. "I'll be seeing you, Mr. Owen," he called.

Miles watched him go, then lifted the valise and went down the steps himself, burying his nose in his collar against the smothering dampness all around him. He was at the bottom step when he heard the sibilance of the door opening behind him, the faraway whisper of danger in his bones.

He turned, and, as he knew it would be, there was Hannah standing at the open door, still holding the gun. But the gun was gripped

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lightly in both hands now, and the menace of it was real and overwhelming.

"I tried to make you understand, Miles," she said, like a child saying the words. "I tried to make you understand."

He flung his arms out despairingly. "No!" he cried wildly. "No!"

And then there was the roar of the explosion in his ears, the gout of flame leaping out toward him, the crushing impact against his chest, and the whole world dissolving. In it, only one thing stood sharp and definable: the figure of the doctor bending over him, the face strangely satanic in its cruel indifference.

For that single moment Miles understood everything. He had been here before. He had lived this hour a thousand times before, and would live it again and again for all eternity. The curtain was falling now, but when it rose again the stage would be set once more for the house party. Because he was in hell, and the most terrible thing of all, the terror which submerged all others, was this moment of understanding given him so that he could know this, and could see himself crawling the infinite treadmill of his doom. Then the darkness closed in with a rush, blotting out all understanding—until next time.

"He's coming around," said the voice.

He was falling. His hands were outflung . . .

CUSTOMER SERVICE OR SUBSCRIBER ASSISTANCE

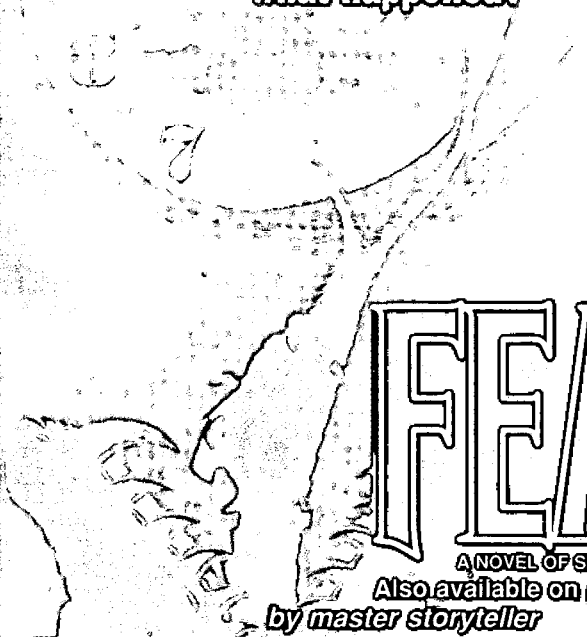
Please direct all changes of address and subscription questions to: Ellery Queen, P.O. Box 7052, Red Oak, IA 51591.

For change of address, please advise 6 to 8 weeks before moving. Send your current mailing label with new address.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What would you do if four hours of your life were suddenly missing?

Would you dare find out what happened?



FEAR

A NOVEL OF SUSPENSE

Also available on audio cassette

by master storyteller

L. RON HUBBARD

COMING IN JANUARY 1991

Copyright © 1990 Bridge Publications, Inc., All rights reserved.

LICENSED TO UN2.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EQMM 50TH ANNIVERSARY CONTEST

Below are five more questions for you to answer if you are participating in the contest to celebrate EQMM's 50th year of publication. The first five appeared in the January issue and there will be five in every issue this year through October. The rules and other information are on the facing page. Take special note that no answers will be accepted until all fifty questions have appeared and that all fifty answers must be sent to us as a unit in order to qualify.

6. Jorge Luis Borges' first appearance in the English language was in EQMM in 1948. What is the title of his story?

7. Who translated the story from the Spanish for EQMM?

8. The series about A. J. Raffles, "the amateur cracksman," was created by E. W. Hornung. After Hornung's death, the series was continued by Barry Perowne—a pseudonym. What was Barry Perowne's real name?

9. The character of Virginia squire sleuth Uncle Abner was conceived by Melville Davisson Post. Who has kept this series alive in our pages after Post's death?

10. Who was the author of the series featuring Section Q's Selena Mead?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

First Prize: Limited-edition poster of *EQMM*'s first cover
Fifty Years of the Best from Ellery Queen, edited by Eleanor Sullivan, published by Carroll & Graf
Ellery Queen 50th Anniversary mug
The option to appear on a cover of *EQMM* with a celebrity of the winner's choice who agrees to said cover

Second and Third Prizes: Limited-edition poster of *EQMM*'s first cover

Fourth through Thirteenth Prizes: *Fifty Years of the Best from Ellery Queen*

Fourteenth through Twenty-third Prizes: Ellery Queen 50th Anniversary mugs

The winner will be the top scorer in answering 50 questions related to *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*—there will be 5 questions an issue from January through October 1991. In case of a tie, the earliest postmark will determine the winner. The deadline is October 15, 1991—entries should carry a postmark no later than that date.

All 50 questions must be submitted as a unit, the pages or copies of the pages for all ten issues together. Material sent in sections will not be considered. Only one entry will be allowed per person. All entries must include the contestant's legal name and full address. No entries will be returned, even if accompanied by a return envelope. Winners will be notified by mail and announced in the March 1992 issue. (No phone calls, please.)

Contributors to *EQMM* are not eligible to win the contest, nor are employees and their immediate families of Davis Publications, Inc., Carlson Promotion Group, or any of their affiliated agents, advertising, and promotional production agencies. All applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations apply.

By entering the contest, all prize winners agree that Davis Publications and any of their respective agencies, affiliates, and employees shall have no liability for any injury, loss, or damage of any kind resulting from acceptance, possession, or use of any prize. Prizes are not transferable and are unreturnable. Davis Publications reserves the right to substitute a prize for one of equal or greater value and is not responsible for lost, late, damaged, or misdirected entries.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

All the while Randi Annenberg ate, an intriguing idea kept bouncing around his mind like dice on a Vegas table. Eddie Bishop had acquired fifty grand in cash. It wouldn't be in the bank, because if Bishop put money in the bank they would apply it against what he owed.

William Bankier's 118th story in EQMM since his first, "What Happened in Act One," in the July 1962 issue . . .

THE COMEBACK

by WILLIAM BANKIER

Sid Annenberg said, "It sounds easy. Jocko gets himself back in shape and fights the champ. And we all make money. But who tells Jocko?"

Eddie Bishop was standing at the window of Sid's gymnasium. He could see down across Algonquin Landing to the wooden steps leading to the river. On the other side, dark pines covered the slope all the way up to a pale-white sky. In the foreground, below on Shooter Street, was the diner Bishop had bought with some of the money from Jocko's big fight fourteen years ago. He could make out Jocko Fair himself on duty behind the counter, talking to Mickey Salazar, who was drinking coffee and eating fries. Her taxicab was parked illegally in the lane.

"I'll tell Jocko," Bishop said. The idea was already losing some of its intensity. "I'm like a father to him." Jocko's real father had been gone a long time.

Bishop limped downstairs. His feet hurt inside the high-topped boots he had to wear to support his considerable weight. Nobody was using the nautilus machines in Sid's new Fitness Center. From

© 1991 by William Bankier.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the aerobics room came the monotonous thud of disco music. Through the doorway, Bishop could see people kicking up their heels. They were a grim-faced bunch.

"You're early," Jocko said, glancing at the clock as his boss entered the diner.

"I have to talk to you."

"I'm out of here," Mickey Salazar said, taking a couple of dollars from her shirt pocket and dropping them on the counter. She slipped off the stool, a wiry woman with smooth black bangs framing Spanish eyes. Eddie Bishop's woman, once in a while.

"You can hear this, Mick," he said. "Sid and I were talking. There's a way for us to make a million bucks. In less than a year. Jocko goes back in the gym. I arrange a couple of fights against reasonable opponents. Nobody too hard. The media gets on it, and within ten months we have him matched against the champ. We're talking megabucks on pay-TV."

"Watch yourself, Jocko." Mickey went to the door and opened it. "I'll be home by ten if you want to talk," she told Bishop. Then she was in her cab and gone down Shooter Street, hitting potholes full of water from the afternoon rain.

Jocko cleared away her cup and plate. He rang up the sale, slipped her money into the till, and put the change in his pocket. He had always known it wasn't over. The big fight fourteen years ago, when he was only twenty-three, had been too much too soon. Even so, he was good. The champion then was a man named Tyrone Turner. There was big excitement in the arena that night because here was a young, handsome heavyweight who was white and who had a chance to win it all. Six rounds later, Jocko Fair was bleeding from the nose and mouth, one eye was closed. The referee stood over him as he rested on one knee, waving his arms to signal he was not letting it go on.

There was no rematch. The promoters had other names with better hype. Eddie Bishop could have signed him to fight guys on the way up or on the way down, he could have had paydays. But Jocko decided to get out before brain damage did things to his walk and his talk.

A customer came into the diner. Jocko whipped a setup into place, paper napkin, knife, fork, and spoon. He served coffee and ladled a bowl of chili from the cauldron. Then he came back to his boss. "You think I can get back? You and Sid?"

"It's our only chance." Eddie reminded Jocko about the developers. They were taking over the whole block. Other shops were selling

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

out. Bishop had refused to sell but he couldn't hold out forever. He owed the bank. He owed everybody. "Wakefield's people will be eager to match him against you. They're starving for a white contender. You've got the reputation. All you need is to get in shape and establish credibility. Two fights would do it."

"Easy for you to say." Jocko knew he had what most people lacked. He could walk out there and get hit in the face. The experience didn't discourage him. His face could soak up the damage from another man's fists. It was something that happened between the two of them, a pact. He didn't understand it. But he knew the joy of raising tired arms at the final bell to embrace the bleeding man who had been beating him bloody.

"You've done it before," Bishop said. "We'll see you through, me and Sid."

"All that roadwork. The sparring. Starving myself." It was his way of saying he would do it.

"I need a definite yes from you, Jocko. A firm commitment." Bishop felt the flutter in his chest. "Because then I'll have to see some people about raising fifty grand to pay the freight. And these are not your average people."

"Don't do it," was Mickey's blunt advice. She had on her tight satin pajamas and was stretched out on the settee, but Eddie's attention was elsewhere. "If you borrow from those people and you don't pay, they'll come after you."

"Why wouldn't I pay? I'm asking for fifty grand. Win or lose, our share of the big fight will be at least a million."

"Jocko is never going to get back to where he can fight Wakefield."

"Mickey, I can't sit around. I need money."

"Then sign with the developers. Accept their offer."

"It isn't enough." He came and sat where she shifted her hips to make room. "I have too many years left. That's my problem."

"What are you talking about?"

"I need to be about five years away from the grave. Then I'd be all set. But the money from selling the diner won't take me past sixty. Then what?"

The iron-grey hair was cut so short she could hardly get a grip on it. "Maybe you'll get lucky and die next year. While there's still enough cash to bury you."

"And where will Jocko work when they tear down The Corner? And where will my customers find a good cheap meal?" Eddie was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

feeling like a beaten fighter, standing up round after round because there was no percentage in falling down.

Just like the old days, Jocko ran the hills early in the morning. He was surprised how quickly his wind came back. Maybe he could do this. Wakefield, if the fight got made, wouldn't take him seriously. It wasn't unheard of for a talented challenger to come into the ring and catch the champion unprepared.

Rounding the last bend in the old road, he could see Algonquin Landing on the other side of the river. A solitary car was crossing the bridge. Chimney smoke drifted straight up from a cottage in the hills above town. Shop windows on Shooter Street caught the rising sun, blazing as if the premises were on fire. He decided to jog to the foot of the hill. Then he would sprint flat out across the bridge and over to the gym for his shower.

When Jocko came out of the steam room toweling his hair, Sid's brother, Randi Annenberg, was working with the weights. It was disturbing to watch how many pounds this man could bench-press. Randi lowered the weights onto the rack, slipped out from under, and got to his feet, clapping chalk from his hands.

"They told me you were trying to get back into shape," he said.

"Look who's talking," the boxer said. "I hear the college kids chased you out of the Vandals' training camp."

There had always been bad feelings between the two athletes. Jocko knew Randi Annenberg only showed up in town when he was out of cash. He would settle in for a few months and sponge off brother Sid. It was true about the Vandals. Once a top-rated linebacker with the West Coast NFL team, Randi's massive body couldn't take the beating any more. His ballyhooed comeback-try had recently ended in failure.

For his part, the football player resented the cozy setup between his brother and Eddie Bishop. He believed, and he stated regularly, that Sid had never been given the credit or the money he deserved when Fair was winning big. He thought the trainer had more to do with Jocko's success than Bishop. He also thought it was absurd for such a creaky geek to have a woman like Mickey Salazar on the string. So whenever he was in town, like now, he always made a play for her. Mickey would date the former linebacker, but eventually he'd move on to New York or Vegas or up across the border to Montreal. The waves would subside and she would take up with Eddie as before.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Now that he was in shorts and shoes, Jocko began to skip rope. Randi watched him with a widening grin on his face. With full black beard, long hair, and slightly bulbous eyes, he looked like a bloodthirsty pirate. "You're serious," he said when Jocko stopped tapping and flashing the rope.

"Eddie wants it."

"You never wised up to that guy."

"He's here when I need him."

"He uses you."

Jocko felt the heat. All those years ago, Eddie Bishop had come into his life when he had nobody. Eddie was his anchor. Eddie was the reason he had never gone under and drowned. "He's put himself on the line to make this fight."

"You're the one who'll take the beating. Bishop doesn't care."

"He went to the guys with the drug money. He signed his name for fifty thousand to finance me. Don't tell me Eddie doesn't care."

Randi showered. He got dressed in his fawn-leather suit and broad-brimmed crimson hat. He left the gym and walked across the street to The Corner, where he ordered eggs and sausages and rye toast and coffee. He hated patronizing Bishop, but this was the best and cheapest breakfast in town.

And all the while he ate, an intriguing idea kept bouncing around his mind like dice on a Vegas table. Eddie Bishop had acquired fifty grand in cash. It wouldn't be in the bank, because if Bishop put money in the bank they would apply it against what he owed.

There had to be a way to lay hands on that cash. Maybe Mickey Salazar would have some ideas.

Jocko was partly her bodyguard, partly her late-night companion. Mickey cruised slowly down the hill and made a right on Shooter Street. Jocko pointed silently to the man at curbside under a streetlight.

"He's drunk," Mickey said, but she slowed.

"You need the business."

"Okay." She brought the cab to a stop, and as Jocko reached back to open the passenger door she said, "But if he spews all over the back seat, you get to clean my car."

They delivered the man home to his cottage on the other side of the bridge. He was sullen, having lost a hundred dollars playing cards upstairs over Lindy's One-Stop. He recognized Jocko. "You should get it together and fight again," he said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You may be surprised," Jocko told him.

Mickey drove on aimlessly. She parked at the landing and switched off the lights. With the windows open, they could hear the slap of water against the pier. Out of sight on the freeway a mile beyond the hill, heavy traffic came and went. A radio on one of the boats was playing top forty. Billy Joel kept insisting he and his generation had nothing to do with starting the fire.

Jocko was undecided about putting his arm around her, so Mickey lit a cigarette. She blew a yard of stiff smoke out the open window. With nothing else to say, Jocko remarked, "I wish the hell Sid's brother would stay out of town."

"Keep out of his way if he bothers you."

"He wants me to lose."

"I want you to forget the stupid fight altogether. However, you won't. You could have had a life, Jocko. But you've become a moron. Too many fists in the face."

"Randi couldn't cut it at the Vandals' training camp. He's over the hill. It drives him crazy to think I may be able to come back."

Mickey finished her cigarette. She stubbed out the butt on the rusty door and tossed it onto the pavement. "Heard the news?"

"What?"

"Your company stinks tonight." She switched on. "I'm taking you home."

He went inside the hotel, performing his stiff-backed swagger. Watching him in the mirror, Mickey sensed the walk was instinctive, he didn't even know he was doing it. What did this pathetic loser have to be proud of? She drove away before her eyes became too wet to see out through the windshield.

As she traversed the intersection at Shooter and Bridge, probably for the last time that night, she saw the familiar shape of Randi Annenberg. Hands in pockets, lips pursed within the glossy beard, he looked as if he owned all of Algonquin Landing. And held a mortgage on the surrounding hills.

"Time to change my luck," Mickey said aloud as she gave a gentle toot on the horn, hung a U-turn, and rolled to a stop where the football player had only to bend his knees slightly to reach the handle on the passenger door.

Inside his narrow room beside the hotel kitchen, Jocko stripped to his underwear and threw himself onto the bed. He pulled the string to kill the light. The tired mattress claimed him, the smell

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the sweat-stained pillow told him he was home. Too bad Mickey was irritated with him. But she'd get over it.

His night light came from the moon reflecting off the tin roof outside the open window. Jocko pressed the radio switch. The talk show that always put him to sleep was in progress. The host was saying, "And this is when you have to ask yourself where the money is coming from for the battered-wife shelters."

Jocko's eyes began to close. Randi Annenberg was full of it. Eddie *did* care what happened to him. Eddie was there when nobody else would even—

The high-school track team was out of state at an important meet. "I've entered you in the mile," Mr. Ferguson said. "I've also entered you in the fifteen-hundred meters." Mr. Ferguson came through the connecting doorway into Jocko's motel room. He was naked. The fifteen-year-old couldn't believe what he was looking at. He was scared and excited and ashamed. Afterward, Mr. Ferguson said it was no big deal. Jocko ran poorly the next afternoon. He quit the track team. Nobody could find out why.

His mother hardly noticed. She was too busy at Dickie McDougall's insurance office. Every day she clattered out of the house in her stiletto heels. "Gimme a break, somebody has to support this family." Always the skirts above the knee and her pretty legs in stockings. Alone in his mother's room, Jocko trembled, he felt weird, as if waves were breaking inside his head. Her perfume smell was everywhere. Her dressing table was littered with tiny bottles and jars and tubes, his pale face hollow-eyed in the mirror.

They were playing the national anthem. Jocko reached out and turned off the radio. His father was raking the lawn. The six-year-old could see the muscular arms, the grey work gloves, and the shiny handle of the rake. But he couldn't see his father's face. There were several green-plastic bags scattered across the back lawn. They were stuffed with leaves fallen from the five tall poplars. The bags were about as big as Jocko, but he could handle them. One by one, he dragged them to the side of the house.

"Good man, Jock," his father called.

The boy's cheeks blazed in the frosty twilight of that autumn afternoon.

Jocko turned over in bed. If his parents hated each other as much as they did, it had to be partly his fault. Why else would his father go away and never come back? When his mother moved to Albany with Dickie McDougall to work in the head office, she said he was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

welcome to come. But when he chose not to, opting to move in with a friend's family, she seemed relieved. His parents didn't despise him, Jocko had come to realize that, but he had never been very important to them.

Thank goodness Eddie Bishop came into the gym that day when he was there alone, nineteen years old, having fun punching the heavy bag. The older man showed him how to do it. He took instruction well. Bishop invited him to come back and he did, showing up on time. The beginning of everything.

Eddie was using him? Eddie didn't care? Jocko smiled as sleep took over at last. Randi Annenberg looked like what he was—the devil's disciple. Let him burn in hell.

Mickey finally made it out of her bedroom and into the kitchen. There was enough light in the sky to etch the shape of slate clouds. Raindrops began pelting the window.

Randi came out in his jockeys and settled onto one of her pine chairs. "You should listen to me," he said.

She assembled scrambled eggs and toast on two plates.

"We can take that fifty grand."

"You're a stranger in this town. I live here." She put a plate in front of him and went to pour coffee. "I can't just rip them off."

"The money will be wasted." With his mouth full, Randi went on, "We'd be doing them a favor. Instead of Jocko getting his brains beat out in his first comeback and all of them looking like fools, they can stop right now."

"You want it all, don't you?"

"I just had it all," the football player said, putting an arm around her hips as she filled his cup. "Now I want Eddie's cash."

She kissed the top of his head. She put the pot on the stove and brought her plate to the table. "I know where he keeps the money. Jocko told me."

"Now you're talking."

"But let's think about it."

"That's the best part," he said, the bulging eyes full of mischief. "Thinking about it. Before we do it."

Tuesday evening at The Corner had been quiet. Eddie said nothing as he stared out the window onto Shooter Street for a full two minutes. Nobody else was going to come in. Finally he said to his count-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

erman, "You may as well go home. You have to run early in the morning."

Jocko slung his apron on a nail. "I can't sleep these nights."

"It means you're on a natural high."

"Did you get a look at Mantro?"

"He weighs two sixty. He can't train any more. You'll have him out of there in two rounds."

"They'll laugh. The sportswriters will tear me up."

"Some may laugh. Let 'em. But they won't tear you up." Bishop waited with the door open as his fighter went outside. "Remember, they want you to succeed. Everybody will want Jocko Fair to beat Willie Wakefield."

At the end of the block, Jocko looked back. The lights were out. Poor tired Eddie was upstairs and into bed already.

Tomorrow was going to be a scorcher. It would make sense to do most of his miles before the sun got over the horizon.

Mickey drove up slowly and parked her cab at the far end of Shooter. She switched off and sat listening to the engine tick. The diner was in sight, windows dark, neon sign extinguished. "I'm still not sold," she said.

"You've never been on the Coast," Randi murmured. "You don't know how sweet it can be when you're out there with money."

"Fifty grand won't last forever."

"Nothing does. But we can have a few months of prime."

"Then what?"

"Who knows? We steal from somebody else. I learned from the great quarterbacks. You only plan a few plays ahead. And make those work. After that, the game takes turns nobody can predict."

Mickey shifted on the torn plastic upholstery. Her car was dying and she had no cash for a better one. Eddie Bishop had been taking her for granted. As for Jocko, he was never going to advance beyond a mental age of fifteen. She herself could see forty looming on the horizon. Randi Annenberg was as reliable as the local savings and loan. But he could sure as hell fly her to San Francisco.

"Okay," she said, opening the door on the driver's side. "Let's do it." Mickey Salazar deserved a run for her money. And this was the only money in town.

They approached the doorway by the dawn's early light. Randi knelt on the pavement and did something to the lock with a short wire he took from his wallet. The door opened and they were inside.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No lights," he whispered.

"There are three coffee tins under the counter. Jocko said it's the one farthest from the cash register."

She crept behind the counter. The tin was the size of a wastepaper basket. The lid came off easily. Mickey raised the tin onto the counter and tipped it to the grey wash from the window. "You're in my light," she whispered.

Randi moved aside. He bumped into a table. A sugar jar rolled off onto the tile floor and smashed. She froze, waited, held her breath.

"Find it!" he whispered.

The tin was half empty. She worked her fingers in the pungent granules and felt a plastic wrap. The package of money was the size of a brick. Randi took it from her and thrust it into the waistband of his jeans.

The light coming on startled them. Eddie Bishop, dentures missing, was at the foot of the stairway. "You guys are pathetic," he said.

"Go." Randi propelled Mickey toward the front door. "Get out."

"Go directly to jail," Bishop said. "Do not collect two hundred dollars." He advanced on the football player. "I'll take what you took."

Annenberg slung the opened tin, but Bishop warded it off with his arm. A swash of coffee hit the mirror. The older man kept coming. Annenberg drew back his fist and hit Bishop in the face. Mickey yelled, "Hey!"

Bishop was on the floor, unconscious. "Now we have to do something," Randi said.

"Let's *go*."

"We can't just yet." He went behind the counter. He found a container of cooking oil. He splashed it around. A stack of newspapers lay on the end of the counter. He began crumpling them and scattering them across the greasy floor.

Mickey pulled at him. "Stop it!"

"Where do you want to go?" he yelled, his face pressed down to hers. "The Coast? Or Ossining?"

"You're killing him!"

"If he wakes up and calls the cops, we'll be on *America's Most Wanted*. This way, it's a fire, he dies. Anybody who knew about the money figures it got burned up."

"This is wrong," she insisted. But she backed out the door and hurried to her car, got in, drove ahead to the corner, and was waiting

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

when Randi came running from the flames. As they headed across the bridge and up the hill toward the freeway on-ramp, she laughed so sharply Annenberg glanced at her.

"Now I understand why people act this way," she said. "It keeps you from going back."

Jocko jogged down the hill to the end of the bridge, then he began sprinting flat out, like Stallone in that great scene from *Rocky*. He wished he had a crowd of kids to cheer him on, but it was all right, he could imagine an ovation as he turned the corner. Then he saw the diner with the door hanging open, framing raging flames.

He kept running right up to the doorway. He leaned inside, holding his breath. Was Eddie still asleep upstairs? Hell no, he was on the floor! Jocko could see him down there where the smoke was not so heavy. He crawled to him, got hold of his legs, and dragged him, edging backward, to the doorway. Then he was able to get his arms under the unconscious man and lift him up and carry him outside.

Jocko laid Eddie down on the wooden deck fronting the menswear shop next door. "Eddie? You okay, Eddie?"

He was breathing. But his nose was knocked sideways with blood running down. Jocko knew all about this kind of injury. Somebody had punched Eddie in the face.

The money! Jocko must have said it out loud because Eddie's eyes came open and he looked anxious. He put his hand on Jocko's arm. "Just a minute—" He had trouble putting words together.

"I'll get it, Eddie." Jocko got off his knees and moved back to the open doorway. In the distance, he heard a siren. The pumper would be too late. He had to get the coffee tin with the fifty grand inside it.

"Jocko, wait—"

"I can do it!" he yelled.

Inside, the heat hit him like a falling wall. It was a solid weight. He dropped to his knees. Cheek to floor, he found just enough oxygen to allow an intake of breath. How long could it take? The counter was burning, but if he could catch hold of the tin he could roll it to the floor. The thought was still in his mind. I can do it!

Eddie raised himself on one elbow as the fire engine pulled up and men in yellow came running. He tried to make himself heard over the roar of the inferno. "Inside! He went inside!"

The firemen knew better than to enter this situation. One of them said, "Then he's not coming out." As if in confirmation, the diner

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ceiling came crashing down in an explosion of smoke and flame, followed by twisting, swirling action as the fire consumed everything inside.

"How long has it been?" Sid asked.

"Eight months." Eddie was at the gym window, looking down at the charred ruins of his diner. As a man who had made a living in the fight game, he was attuned to a show-business way of thinking. He wasn't embarrassed by a poetic view of circumstances. Below, in ashes, lay his dream. Jocko was dead.

But though there would be no million-dollar match with the champion, things could be worse. His insurance, while not adequate, had produced a sizeable check. The developers, reacting to Bishop's claim that he would rebuild and carry on business at the old location, had sweetened their offer and he accepted. There was enough money to pay back the $50,000 plus interest. And he now had close to sixty grand to be going on with.

"Eight months is a long time," Sid said.

"I won't do it," Bishop said. "Leave it alone."

"You protected him. You never told the police it was Randi."

"I was protecting Mickey."

"They'll have spent the money by now. I know my brother."

"Leave it, Sid."

Bishop departed the gym, walked to the bridge, crossed over to the landing. He sat on the far bench, where he could see open water past the flotilla of moored boats. In less than five minutes, Sid was crunching across the gravel to sit beside him. The old trainer continued, "I remembered the name of the football player. Herschel Walker."

"Forget it."

"The media was really into it for a while. They wanted to see Walker fight Tyson."

Bishop put a hand on his old friend's knee. "If we approach your brother, he could get antsy. He tried to kill me. He knows I remember that. He might finish me off."

"He'll listen. Randi listens to money."

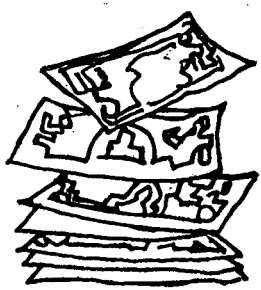
The old men watched a yacht leave the mooring. Then Sid went on talking. "Five years ago, the Vandals were in the Superbowl. Randi made two interceptions. He sacked their quarterback four times. The Wrestling Federation has been after him. He's big, he's tough. Eddie, he's white."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm not taking that chance."

"You wanted a million-dollar fight." Sid spoke complacently, believing he could wear his man down. "We can sell this."

A breeze blew off the water. Bishop could smell pine trees. It seemed like sacrilege, but he had to admit a certain truth. Jocko Fair would always be a bigger name in heaven. But Randi Annenberg would draw better on pay-TV.



DETECTIVERSE

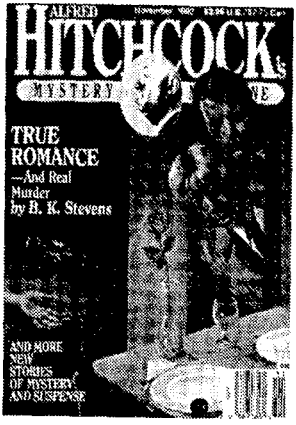
THE GOSSIPS

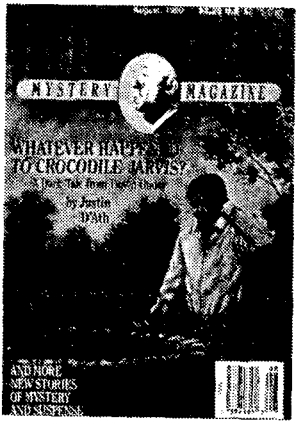
by TOM CARPENTER

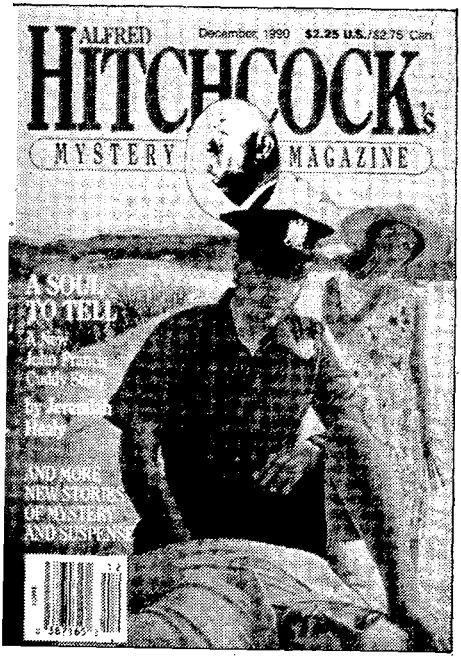
'Twas July when we buried Calhoun
And sealed him up tight in his tomb.
His headstone is bare
With no markings there,
Since his name we had buried in June.

© 1991 by Tom Carpenter.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED







QUENCH YOUR THIRST FOR MYSTERY

ALFRED HITCHCOCK's MYSTERY MAGAZINE

SUBSCRIBE NOW AND SAVE UP TO 29% OFF THE BASIC PRICE

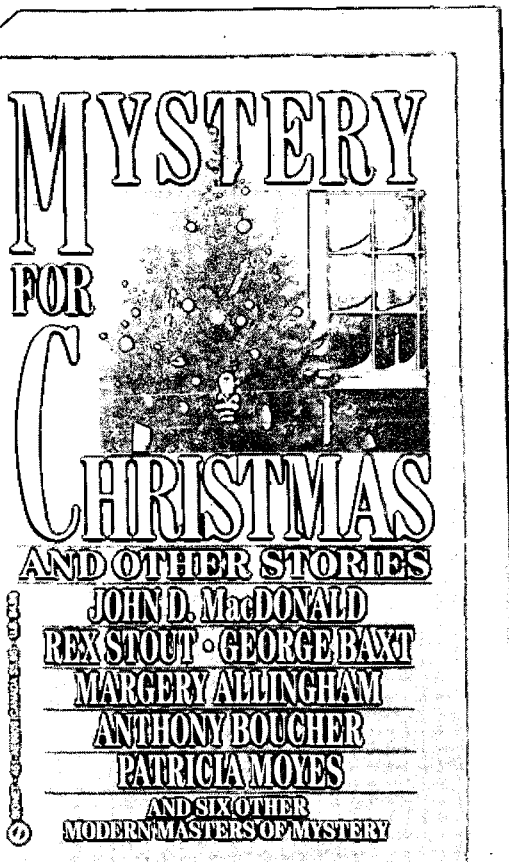
CALL TOLL-FREE1-800-333-3311

MSSQ-3

3 issues for only $26.97—29% savings. 12 issues for $18.97—25% savings.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Twelve mysteries all wrapped up for Christmas



$4.95
SIGNET
Penguin USA

Christmas time is mystery time, with this one-of-a-kind collection of stories with Christmas themes drawn from *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* and *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. Here are chilling stories for the holidays by Margery Allingham, John D. MacDonald, George Baxt, Malcolm McClintock, James Powell, and many more.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Try your hand at great mystery reading . . .

Subscribe to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine and enjoy issue after issue of spine-tingling suspense stories, humorous detectiverses, and insightful reviews of current mystery novels.

☐ Please send me 18 issues for $26.97
I save 29% off the basic price.

☐ Please send me 12 issues for $18.95
I save 25% off the basic price.

Ellery Queen
P.O. Box 7051
Red Oak, IA 51591

OR CALL 1-800-333-3053

☐ Payment Enclosed

☐ Bill Me

☐ Charge (Circle one)

MasterCard VISA

Card # _____

Exp. Date _____

Signature _____

Outside the U.S. & possessions 12 for $25.97. 18 for $38.97 (cash with order U.S. funds). Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for delivery of your first issue.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

HSSC-0

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

DONALD OLSON

Even in the twilight atmosphere in the English Bar, Prather could see that up close, although he was exceptionally clean-featured, the gold had begun to tarnish. The bronzed skin, etched with faint lines around streetwise blue eyes, revealed a slight coarsening. "My name's Tucker McCoigh," the young man said. "I know your wife."

Donald Olson's 34th story in EQMM since the first, "Vengeance Villa," in the August 1969 issue . . .

FINAL PAYMENT

by DONALD OLSON

I arrived home from an afternoon of bridge at the club to find Meribelle in the bedroom doing her nails.

"Drinks with the Beardsleys at six," she reminded me. "You'd better change."

I grumbled something about a boring evening ahead, to which she replied, "You like bores. What else is there at the Paragon Club?"

True enough, but it's about the only refuge for the upper-bracket unemployed husband, and it keeps me out of Meribelle's hair. Lovely hair it is. An altogether lovely woman, Meribelle, if possessing in the eyes of the envious perhaps more taste than intelligence, more style than sentiment, and a social flair that passes for sophistication among her undemanding cronies.

"I played tennis with Sally this afternoon," she said. "That new couple she met, the Smiths, are definitely interested in the cottage. We really must make a decision." The royal we. We both knew I had nothing to do with it.

© 1991 by Donald Olson.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This recent preoccupation with selling the cottage Meribelle's father had left to her on Lime Lake forty miles north of the city made no sense to me whatsoever and I said so again.

"It's a needless expense," she retorted, "now that you're not working." The cutting edge of the knife.

"A temporary situation." The company's reorganization had left me redundant. Happily so, I might add.

"Do tell. I've heard nothing about any prospects."

"Meribelle, you know as well as I do that my career, laugh-laugh, was always a total farce. What I do now I'll likely do for the rest of my life. I want to be sure it's the right move."

She finished her nails and delicately recapped the bottle. "Meanwhile we make do on my money."

Make do. That was a laugh. Her old man left her a bundle. So why shouldn't we live on it? For twelve years I'd nobly insisted that we live on my salary.

But what *did* I want to do? Climb Everest? Sail the seven seas? Paint pictures? Write novels? In my reveries I'd toyed with an endless string of romantic possibilities. Meribelle would have been drolly amused by my latest fantasy, in which I played the role of detective. At the bridge table in front of the plate-glass window at my club, my attention had increasingly begun to stray from the cards in my hand to the bustling activity of Whitestone Avenue where it borders the Embankment and Paragon Square in the heart of the city. This fascination with the teeming variety of life in the streets had led me on several recent occasions to forgo my afternoon at the club for what I soon found to be a more entertaining diversion. I began to follow people.

Put like that, it sounds a bit nutty—undignified, at the least, behavior in a respectable man which a shrink might even term "deviant." Ah, but it was great fun: David Prather, detective, shadowing strangers for no other purpose but to discover where they went and what they did, my imagination investing them with all manner of illicit proclivities. At times I'd pretend I'd been hired to follow them, paid to "get the goods" on them.

So it happened that one afternoon as I sat on my bench beside the Embankment, scanning the passersby for a particular individual who might prove an interesting "subject" to follow, I chanced to notice a taxi pull to the curb across the street. A woman stepped out. At first I wasn't certain, for Meribelle never wore hats or such

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

outsize dark glasses, and why use a taxi when she had her own car? But as the woman turned to study her image in a shop window I saw that it was Meribelle. Strange. I recalled her telling me that morning that she meant to spend all afternoon at her tennis club.

I made haste to follow her, but cautiously, carrying the newspaper I always had with me to shield my face if necessary from a too alert subject. Meribelle strolled east on Whitestone, then quickened her pace as she neared the massive public library, not climbing the steps but turning aside into the adjacent park and sitting down on one of the benches under a eucalyptus tree.

I climbed to the uppermost step from where I could look down unobserved into the park. Fewer than five minutes passed before a young man joined her on the bench. He wore the regulation denim of his generation, was well built and bronzed, with a crop of wheat-blond hair.

More than a shade of infelicity had clouded our marital relationship, but the specter of infidelity had never arisen. I would have judged it to be totally out of character with Meribelle's snobbish, exaggerated sense of the social and domestic amenities. Playing around was simply not her style, and to do so with a young demigod in denim would surely be beneath her dignity. Still, who was I to deny the possibility of Meribelle enjoying secret fantasies as seemingly inappropriate as my own?

Yet what I felt, observing the pair in earnest conversation, was not so much jealousy as envy, envy of that robust creature radiating a visible gloss of youth that filled me with a sense of my own shortcomings, my failures and frustrations, and the sad, swift passage of time.

Presently, with what seemed in my view a certain furtiveness of manner, Meribelle handed the young man a long manila envelope. Good Lord, I mused, could she be *paying* him!

Naturally, I was beset with curiosity to know more about this vibrant animal with whom my wife appeared to be sharing some intimate experience. Cautiously avoiding any chance of her spotting me as she remained seated on the bench, I proceeded to follow him as he left the park. Again, I became the detective, but with a deeply personal interest in the case.

Golden Boy's first stop was at a gym—where else with that superb physique? I waited in a nearby coffee shop until he reappeared. After making a few purchases at a sidewalk market, he walked four blocks

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to one of those dingy roominghouses that line Lower George Street near the river.

At dinner that evening I casually inquired about Meribelle's afternoon on the tennis court. She made a face and said her serve had been off. "Probably the heat. By the way, David, I told Sally we'd definitely made up our minds to sell the cottage. She's to arrange a time with the Smiths for seeing it. I thought the first of next week."

Could Meribelle be seriously worried about money? Was Golden Boy *blackmailing* her?

"You were at the tennis club all afternoon?" I asked, not looking at her.

"Yes, of course. I certainly wouldn't go into the city on a day like this."

Who'd said anything about her going into the city? That she made a point of denying it clinched my suspicion that whatever business she had with Golden Boy, it was not innocent.

A stakeout. The phrase excited me. I would stake out the roominghouse, wait until Golden Boy appeared, resume following him, pick up what clues I could, seek to identify him, and then—well, how I might use the information depended on developments.

So there I waited the next morning in my car, concealed behind my newspaper, until shortly after ten he came out carrying a bulky green-plastic bag which he toted to a nearby laundromat, where he remained for over an hour. From there he returned to the roominghouse briefly before making his way to a fast-food restaurant. The ensuing hour was spent in what appeared to be an aimless trek along the city streets, leading eventually uptown to Whitestone Avenue.

To my astonishment, Golden Boy hesitated a moment outside the Paragon Club, then ran up the steps and disappeared through the door. This extraordinary turn of events left me utterly at sea. What possible errand could have brought Meribelle's boy friend to my club?

After loitering indecisively in the street for five minutes, I followed him inside. Charlie, the aged club steward, buttonholed me in the lobby.

"Afternoon, Mr. Prather. Young fellow's just come in asking for you. I told him he might wait in the lounge." He pursed his lips in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mute disapproval, as if young men in denim might sully the tone of the Paragon Club.

Golden Boy advanced to meet me as I entered the lounge. He looked taller and broader than when I'd followed him in the streets.

"You wanted to see me?" I inquired with a frown.

"Mr. Prather, right?"

"Yes."

He glanced around. The leather armchairs were all occupied. "There someplace we can talk?"

I took him into the oak-paneled English Bar where the only other two members present gave the young man discreetly curious glances. I ordered a brandy and soda. Golden Boy asked for a beer. We retired to a corner table.

Even in the twilight atmosphere, I could see that up close, although he was exceptionally clean-featured, the gold had begun to tarnish. The bronzed skin, etched with faint lines around streetwise blue eyes, revealed a slight coarsening. "My name's Tucker McCoigh," he said. "I know your wife."

"Really? I don't recall her mentioning your name."

His smile betrayed the false innocence of a sly, precocious child. "We met at the tennis club. I worked there."

I could picture him in tennis whites, fantasy food for bored suburban housewives idling away their afternoons on the court, or more likely in the club lounge—for Golden Boy, despite his appearance, projected more the air of a bartender or waiter than athlete. "You no longer work there?" I asked.

"I got canned. Sticky fingers. That's how they found out about my record. I done time upstate. Your wife's on the board at Moon Brook. My hard-luck story sort of got to her, or so I thought. She bought me lunch a couple of times after I got canned—on the sly, of course. Nice lady—I *thought*."

"Look, if this has something to do with my wife—"

"Yeah, it has. She wants you dead, man."

For an instant my brain malfunctioned. I could only gape. He lowered his voice to a scandalized whisper while his eyes, steady as a sharpshooter's, focused on mine. "No fooling, man. She made me a proposition."

The air-conditioning might suddenly have plunged to arctic level. "Are you telling me that my wife hired you to kill me?" The words sounded absurdly melodramatic in the hushed, genteel atmosphere of the English Bar.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"She give me the down payment. I get the rest—ten grand—when the job's done."

"Nonsense," I blustered. "If my wife wanted to get rid of me she could divorce me. She's the one with the money."

"Money ain't got nothing to do with it. She said divorce would be—awkward." Again the insinuating whisper of scandal: "Ain't saying it's true but I heard gossip around the club about her and some high monkey-monk in politics."

Why did everything he say carry an air of improvisation, as if he were making it up as he went along? Could he be mentally defective? Having endowed him with all the physical graces, had nature short-changed him upstairs?

"So why are you telling me?" I demanded.

"'Cause I ain't no killer, man. I need the cash, but that deal's too heavy for me."

"So why didn't you refuse?"

"Like I said, I need the money. Bad. I gotta get out of this town."

"But now you *have* told me, you won't get the money. If you're deluding yourself that *I* could pay you for telling me—"

"No, man, you're missing the point. See, I got this neat idea like how I can pocket the money and *not* do the job. But you gotta co-operate. Listen, she's got it all worked out—"

With that, he proceeded to explain how Meribelle planned to tell me that someone wanted to view the cottage at Lime Lake. I was supposed to drive up there and show it to them. Only there wouldn't be anyone there but McCoigh. He was to shoot me with my own revolver, make it look like suicide. Simple. Foolproof. He said that Meribelle had been spreading a rumor among her friends that I was depressed about losing my job and had threatened to kill myself.

That I was horrified by these disclosures goes without saying, and yet the immediate effect they created was more bizarre than gruesome. It may be that if one lives too much in revery, the real and the unreal become confused. That Meribelle had come to regard me as pretty much a dead loss as a husband I had accepted for some time, but that she would stoop to anything as sordid as murder—no, that was beyond belief.

When I said as much, McCoigh scoffed. "Sounds to me like you don't know your wife, man. You want proof, is that it? I can show you proof. Before I pull your plug I'm supposed to force you to write a suicide note. She wrote out the exact words so I wouldn't screw up."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He reached for his wallet, unfolded a piece of paper, and handed it to me.

> "My darling, Forgive me for what I'm doing. You've given me everything but there's nothing left inside. When there seems no difference between living and dying you do what comes easier. Don't grieve for me. I love you, but that's no longer enough. Please don't blame yourself. You'll be happier without me."

The evidence was undeniable, yet how could such words relate to me? Who was this woman who had written them? How could I have shared my life with her all these years and only now discover I'd been living with a stranger, a monster of deceit and wickedness?

McCoigh, with the animal instinct of his breed, seemed to read my mind. "Her own handwriting, ain't it? You believe me now?"

"Oh, yes," I whispered. "I believe you."

As he snatched the note from my hand and returned it to his wallet, I was only dimly conscious, my brain in a ferment, of the sickening drone of his voice as he went on to detail the rest of Meribelle's scheme, telling me how he was to return to the city at night to report that I was dead and to collect his final payment. Late the following day Meribelle was to call the police. Pretending concern about my absence, she would repeat what she'd told others about my precarious state of mind and suggest I might have gone to the cottage and done something desperate.

"I'll be long gone," McCoigh added gleefully. "With all that sweet cash and no murder rap hanging over my head. Take my advice, man. Ditch that broad. Hell, can't you just see the look on her face when you come walking in on her after holing up in the cottage? She won't dare try that stunt again."

He made it all sound like a hilarious joke, a real howl, and why wasn't I laughing? Hoping to wipe that smirk from his face, I said coldly, "What if I go to the police with all this?"

"What if you did? She's already got people believing you're a head case."

Even as he spoke, a more diabolical course of action was taking shape in my mind, a punishment more fitting to the crime. Divorce may not have been what Meribelle wanted, but a divorce is what she'd get. Though not before enriching me with the means to turn even my most extravagant fantasy into reality.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I agreed that it might be imprudent to involve the police, but when I suggested McCoigh should nonetheless entrust me with the note Meribelle had written, he vetoed the idea with a cagy smile.

"I'm not that dumb, buddy. You just might be tempted to use it against her—and me." Making an obvious show of concealing his action from the two men at the bar, he once again took out the folded note and with his lighter ignited the paper, holding it until the flame all but consumed it before dropping it into the ashtray. "There—now we can trust each other," he said.

I didn't protest. The physical evidence itself was unimportant. I remembered every word Meribelle had written. All that mattered was that she should believe I could produce the note if necessary.

That evening the Detective became the Actor, the real me hidden behind the mask of the unsuspecting husband. And if I was good, Meribelle was better. Meribelle was superb. One would never have guessed she had rehearsed her lines.

"David darling, it's all fixed up with the Smiths. They called this afternoon and can't wait to see the cottage. He's into fishing and all that. They asked if I could show it to them tomorrow afternoon, but I have that political-study-group thing. I told them you'd be glad to meet them there. No problem, is there? I said I was sure you hadn't any pressing engagements." The bite of sarcasm before the taste of blood.

I'd be lying if I denied that faint tremor of misgiving causing my foot to ease up on the gas as I approached the bend in the river with its first view of the lake and the stone cottage set back from the shore within a ring of towering pines. I knew the "Smiths" would not be waiting for me, but could I be equally certain about McCoigh? Had the burning of the note been only a trick to disarm my suspicions? Had even my being forewarned been another devious twist in Meribelle's plot?

When I discovered the cottage to be empty, I began to relax. Yet I didn't feel comfortable there, and as soon as I'd unpacked my provisions I changed into jeans and sneakers and walked down to the lake, where I sat on a bench at the end of the dock to reflect on all that had happened.

Confidence returned as the day waned. A splendid sunset fired the western sky. I felt for the first time in years an inner power to order my own destiny and shape the pattern of my future.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Only once that evening, when there came a knock at the door as I was sorting through a collection of old fishing lures, did I feel a sudden, heart-clutching alarm. But it was only Will Sherbrooke, who owned the nearest adjacent cottage. Seeing my light, he'd come to investigate, there having been a recent rash of break-ins along the shore. I welcomed his company and insisted he have a beer with me. We sat chatting until after midnight.

The next day I remained close to the cottage, waiting for the police to arrive. I would apologize for Meribelle's having bothered them unnecessarily and explain that I'd come up to the cottage to do some thinking, had got to chatting with an old friend, and decided to stay the night.

By nightfall they'd still not arrived, leaving me in a quandary. With each passing hour, my edginess grew more acute. I napped fitfully, alert for the sound of a car or a knock at the door, but there was only the mournful soughing of the night wind in the overshadowing pines. Had Meribelle decided it might be wiser to allow at least a couple of days to pass before sounding the alarm?

When another full day had passed uneventfully, I waited until dark, locked up the cottage, and drove back to the city, dismissing one after another a string of possible explanations. Could the whole business have been no more than a cruel, meaningless charade?

The house was dark when I arrived. Assuming Meribelle must be asleep, I unlocked the door quietly, switched on the light, and stepped into the hall. The house was silent, and as tidy as usual—until I went upstairs into the bedroom.

Meribelle lay fully clothed on the bed, but she was not asleep. Her head was turned aside on a pillow of blood. One hand hung limply over the side of the bed, the fingers almost touching the revolver on the floor. A note lay beside her, and not until I picked it up and examined it more closely did I recognize it as the very same piece of paper McCoigh had shown me at the club.

Meribelle lay dead, and beside her the note to explain her death: a suicide note, unmistakably in Meribelle's handwriting.

The note I'd watched McCoigh burn.

It was on a stormy night about a month after Meribelle's funeral, as I was going through some papers on which the lawyer handling

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her estate required my signature, when the doorbell broke my concentration.

The shock would have been only slightly more unnerving had I found Meribelle herself rather than Tucker McCoigh on the doorstep.

"Hey, buddy, how's it going?" His hair and shoulders were drenched with rain, but there was nothing damp about his beaming smile. In my astonishment I didn't notice the duffel bag strapped to his shoulder until he brushed past me into the hall and flung it down.

"What the hell are you doing here?" I stammered.

My consternation plainly amused him. "I thought it was safe by now to come home."

"Home?"

"Tough about your wife, man."

Automatically, I moved to shut the door, then swung around to face him as he stood there, his hands on his hips, gazing at everything but me.

"You killed her!" I cried.

"Ain't what the papers said," he replied smugly.

I followed as he wandered into the living room, dropping heavily onto one of the twin sofas flanking the fireplace.

"Hey, don't look at me like that, man. *She* screwed up, I didn't. When I got here that night I told her you was dead, but she turned bitchy, tried to hold out on me. We sort of mixed it up and she got shot. It was an accident. I made it look like suicide, and the note clinched it, right?"

"An accident! Don't lie to me, McCoigh. That note in Meribelle's handwriting, is that what gave you the idea? You tricked me into thinking you'd burned it. I suppose you expected me to want to keep it and you had a duplicate in your wallet."

He leaned his head back and gazed at the ceiling. "I never trusted her, man. Snotty rich broads, they're all alike. Hell, why should I settle for a crummy ten grand? It's all yours now, right?"

"I see. You decided you'd play for bigger stakes."

"Sure, I'm a gambler. And I was right about you. You didn't blab to the cops."

"It's not too late."

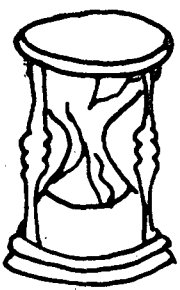
"Ain't it? It would be your word against mine. They just might believe you hired me to kill her. We been seen together. Like at your club."

He stood up, stretched, stifled a yawn. "Man, I'm really beat. And

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I need a shower." He strolled past me into the hall, picked up the duffel bag, then turned at the foot of the stairs.

"Well?" He looked back at me with a boyishly innocent, inquiring smile. "Which is my room?"



STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION (Required by 39 U.S.C. 3685)
1. Title of Publication: Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. Publication No. 00136328.
2. Date of Filing: October 1, 1990. 3. Frequency of Issue: Every 28 Days with special issues in March and October; (A) No. of Issues Published Annually: 13; (B) Annual Subscription Price: $31.97.
4. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication: 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10168.
5. Complete Mailing Address of the Headquarters or General Business Offices of the Publishers (not Printers): 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10168.
6. Names and Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor: President: Joel Davis, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10168; Editor: Eleanor Sullivan, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10168; Managing Editor: Russell Atwood, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10168.
7. Owner: Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10168; Davis Communications, Inc., 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10168; Joel Davis, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10168.
8. Known Bondholders, Mortgages, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or other Securities: NONE.
10. Extent and Nature of Circulation: Average No. Copies each Issue During Preceeding 12 Months: (A) Total No. Copies Printed (Net Press Run) 272,060; (B) Paid Circulation: (1) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, and Counter Sales: 12,912; (2) Mail Subscription: 209,411; (C) Total Paid Circulation: 222,323; (D) Free Distribution by Mail, Carrier or Other Means Samples, Complimentary, and Other Free Copies: 1,147; (E) Total Distribution (Sum of C and D): 223,470; (F) Copies Not Distributed: (1) Office Use, Left Over, Unaccounted, Spoiled After Printing: 5,761; (2) Return from News Agents: 42,829; (G) Total (Sum of E and F should equal net press run shown in A): 272,060.
Actual Number Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: (A) Total No. Copies Printed (Net Press Run): 262,217; (B) Paid Circulation: (1) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, and Counter Sales: 12,972; (2) Mail Subscription: 209,113; (C) Total Paid Circulation: 222,085; (D) Free Distribution by Mail, Carriers or Other Means Samples, Complimentary, and Other Free Copies: 931; (E) Total Distribution (Sum of C and D): 223,016 (F) Copies not Distributed: (1) Office Use, Left Over, Unaccounted, Spoiled After Printing: 1,676; (2) Return from News Agents: 37,525; (G) Total (Sum of E and F should equal net press run shown in A): 262,217.
I certify that the statements made by me are correct and complete.

Elizabeth Beatty
Circulation Director

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ELLERY QUEEN CONTEST FIRST-PRIZE WINNER—1947

"The President of the United States, Detective" by H. F. Heard was the second first-prize winner in the thirteen years of EQMM's international contests. About the story, Ellery Queen wrote in 1970, in his Introduction to The Golden Thirteen:

"When the story was first published in 1947, it had a strange—and at the time, disturbing—reception. Almost without exception, readers and critics disapproved of the story, and editor EQ, to put it mildly, was pilloried. But an even stranger thing has happened since the story's first appearance twenty-three years ago. More and more readers have heard about 'that prophetic story,' and have asked us to reprint it. Could it be that Messrs. Heard and Queen were too far ahead of the times? Read (or reread) the story for its imaginative thrust, in a figurative rather than a literal sense . . ."

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, DETECTIVE

by H. F. HEARD

"I'm puzzled by some of my readings," Skelton volunteered.

No one in the clubroom was sufficiently interested to raise his eyes from the illustrated paper he was leafing through. Skelton was the tidal expert. The other specialists of this team at the newest marine laboratory agreed about few things, but Skelton's job was one of them and Skelton was another. "After all," they used to remark, "he's only a sort of lab boy to us. The meteorologist has really more of value to give. Skelton's nothing but a timekeeper."

But Skelton was evidently puzzled enough not to take a snub. He cleared his throat with a certain defiance. "I've mentioned the possibility earlier to one or two of you. But now there's no doubt—and, what's more, no possible reason for it."

Copyright © 1947 by H. F. Heard, renewed in 1975 by H. F. Heard.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Still no one reacted.

"It'll really matter to all of you if it's true." A note of urgency made his voice strain. The tone more than the words irritated Bolder, one of the chemists. To stop the sound which he found made his reading difficult he looked over the edge of *Life* and asked, "What are they showing?"

"Well, it's slight, of course, but it's unmistakable—and there's no doubt it's growing. The high tides for each corresponding month have each been gaining on the last. There's no doubt an increase in the maxima and, what's incomprehensible, there's no reason."

That made Exon intervene. He was the large marine biologist. Someone said that he had taken to his subject because of all creation mollusks were the hardest of animals to pick quarrels with.

"You'll be saying next the moon's out of step or the sun's got a 'swelled head.' "

"Laws of nature don't change." This was from Simson. He was the geneticist, one that had never quite recovered from the violent controversies with which the birth of his subject had been attended. He was an old man now and only a boy then. But his father—biology ran in the family—had been involved in the bitterness between the elder Darwinians and the Mendelians, as they were then called. Simson reacted into the strictest orthodoxy. He used to repeat his maxim like a mantra whenever anyone introduced findings which might be radical.

"Your instruments are wrong, young man—that's what it is."

Of course such a remark is a reflection. But it was clear that Simson had the room with him. Skelton could not command a single ear. He was upset, quite upset. Of course, it was clear if that was the reception given by such men as his colleagues, he could hope for nothing better from anyone outside—at least, in the professional world. And how could he expect the lay world to pay attention if the experts disregarded?

He left the clubroom, but before going to his apartment went back to his division of the laboratories. He checked his tables again with worried care. He plotted his graph over again. The result stood. Of course, it was slight, but science had no right to ignore facts because they first emerged as small divergencies. It might well be—no, not the instruments or faulty observation—but some more or less local peculiarity, some current shift, surface wind-pressure even, or perhaps a change of levels in the oceanic floor. His instruments were the best in the world—his new setup had been equipped with a plant

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

better than any other marine lab in history. And though the rest might look down on his job as mere routine, he knew he had been picked as a first-class observer.

No one else in the tidal world had as yet reported any evidence of possible shift of maxima. But then, why should they? These instruments were incomparable. Besides, the change, whatever it was, might have become evident here on this shoreline first. Well, he would be right in one thing—it would be peculiarly awkward for all those colleagues of his.

That was Midsummer Day.1977. The world had been going on its increasingly odd way for a third of a century—since in '45, W.W.2A (World War Second Armistice) had begun. Tension for thirty years makes crisis turn into a kind of stasis. "Bomb! Bomb!" had gone the degenerative way of "Wolf!"

Besides, there had been changes—large political changes. All the old lot were gone. Of course, the world was still stuck in that balance of power which was commonly called the Two Powers and the Hyphen. There was the U.S., the U.K., and the U.S.S.R. When someone once asked in Congress why the Hyphen was still called the United Kingdom, a wisecracker shot in that U.K. was really a contraction for "the Un-O.K." There was no doubt of it—the world had shrunk to two big balances with a diminishing rider-on-the-beam.

But there was bigger and less foreseen change than that. That which had been called the Russian Revolution had itself swayed uneasily on the beam. Should it go West or East? Finally, the Russian tendency won—the deep racial tendency to go Tartar, to go East. The great Moscow ascendency passed very quickly after Stalin's death. The Greek Orthodox Church canonized him as St. Joseph of Moscow, and Moscow followed the fate of all holy cities. Actual administration had increasingly moved East.

Just as had happened to the earlier world empire—when Rome had to make a New Rome and then abdicate to it—so now the administrative center had shifted away, back to the site of Ghenghis' world capital, Karakorum. Once the assimilation of China took place, then the center of population, industry, and business lay there.

China, as usual, had swallowed those who rashly tried to get her into their clutches. Finally that astute Commissar, Yang Chin, ruled that Moscow had become a place of too sacred memories to be defiled by business and the Russians were too mystically gifted a race to be involved in politics. Just as England used to get rid of individual politicians who were in the way by "kicking them upstairs"—making

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

them peers—so, as became the new order that thought no longer in individuals but in classes, the New Commissar of Commissars, as he chose to be entitled, elevated the whole of the Russians to Ritual Rank—the highest rank, the one that performed all the ceremonies. The rank below, naturally, did all the hard work—the actual running of the machine.

It seemed that these internal shifts were going to keep the huge land-mass empire outwardly quiet. Most people wanted good auguries, so they claimed this change was one. "A Chinese," they told each other, "never likes war. We'll have peace for a long while now, you mark my words." And their words appeared to have been accurate.

But Washington—or rather the tip of it—was not really easy. On the tip now sat President Place. He had many points that recommended him. Firstly, his name. It had given him the first three terms largely through the great success of three slogans—"Place the Irreplaceable," "Place him again," and that fine starter, "Make Place for the People, Give Place to the People." Secondly, there was his size. He was a mammoth of a man. His hands were bigger even than George Washington's, he was taller than Lincoln, he weighed more than Taft. "The biggest President ever." That told, too.

Thirdly, behind the bulk and the bellow, the rampart and the roar—for he could shout down anyone—behind that vast build-up of eloquence and adiposity, in which it seemed so obvious there could be nothing more than a balloon of bluffness, there was a curiously observant mind. He certainly was not as simple as he looked—that was his first line of defense. His sudden assaults of frank man-to-man openness, which proved often so disconcerting to the clever, were uncommonly well timed. After a while it was noted that he never let anyone else put over that kind of thing on him. It was he, always, who brought down that great sirloin of a hand and wrist on the shoulder of the other disputant, patted him almost to his knees; and, bellowing that they really agreed, pushed him out of the room.

His fourth strong point—as one scaled this Gulliver giant—lay in his throat. He had vocal cords to equal all his other outsize dimensions, and he certainly knew how to handle them. In his first campaign his voice had been called "The Diapason of Democracy." The title stuck. And he certainly could do such things with the diaphragms of every democrat throughout the world that he soon earned himself another title: "The Spokesman of the Western Hemisphere."

When you reached his head—if you got so far—you found the clue

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to these apparent contraries. It's hard to look a man square in the eyes who naturally looks clean over the top of your head and when he does look at you must look down. But if you did, you were repaid. The head was huge—no tailing off at the top. The eyes were deep-set, so you scarcely guessed how little they missed. But suddenly they would open and then they were more imperative than the voice. It used to be remarked, "If he roars, you obey. If he glares, you go."

But the real power lay back in that huge head. Everything interested him. That was why he had become the Head. Specialists found they could come to him and somehow he'd understand—far better than their colleagues. He wasn't a specialist but better than any of them he could always see what they were driving at. And so he could link them up. Further, he'd see where their high-magnification finds would be tending.

Yes, the people had once again shown their profound horse sense. They had chosen a mountain of a man whose head saw much farther than either the specialist or the man in the street would ever see. And crowning all these inner advantages was the fact that, in spite of his high scoring, no one could believe that it wasn't after all just luck. People couldn't help feeling that a man as large as that couldn't be as shrewd as he was big.

Yes, he certainly didn't look like a vigilant man. That no doubt was the reason why he had so seldom been caught napping. Naturally, then, his adversaries, all around the globe, were seldom out of his mind.

Some three months after Skelton's failure to interest his marine colleagues, Place the Irreplaceable was waiting in his White House room for the Chief of Staff. He had been away on a courtesy mission which covered inevitably a secret inquiry. The mission was to carry congratulations to the Commissar of Commissars on his unanimous election to preside for another Five Years of Plan. The inquiry was to find out if there could be any truth in one of those maddeningly ambiguous reports that secret-service agents of the highest standing delight in sending to their superiors. Such reports are like the pronouncements of the Delphic oracle: they may be just to fill the time and show that you are worth your fee, or they may be ways of tying up a message so that only your own chiefs can see the point.

If Place and Chief of Staff Chase were right, this message was the latter. But if so, it was unusually urgent, and confirmation must be had as quickly as possible. The only way—and it seemed providen-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tial—was for the Chief of Staff, since he must go with the congratulations, to go himself as a secret-service agent.

The C. of S. was late. It was no use trying to learn what a plane was doing once it was over the territories of the U.S.S.R., an empire that now stretched from Bangkok to the Rhine Basin. While Place waited, his secretary came in. "There's no news of the plane yet," she reported. "You have a few minutes?"

"What do you want me to do?" he questioned as he slowly spun his huge bulk in its special revolving chair.

"Well, he's a relation of my sister's—a tidal expert—and he's worried me. I've looked him up and he evidently is a good man at his job. Seems to me that it's just because he may have found out something a little too startling that maybe his colleagues won't listen to him. And he's quite certain now that nobody but you would, and that you'd understand if he could see you for only five minutes, and that now you and you alone should know."

Irreplaceable Place, who had replaced quite enough experts and specialists by others who proved to be just as good, had a particular respect for the breed who gets alarmed at apparent trifles. For the moment, too, he had nothing to do. He had to wait and he hated waiting. Also, his secretary wanted it.

"You say he's a tidal expert?"

"Yes, he's from that biggest and newest setup on the Atlantic Coast."

"All right, but only five minutes to the tick. If he can't interest me by then, out he goes."

As Skelton entered, he was met with, "You've got exactly three hundred seconds. Can you make it?"

"I've got it all in three charts." Skelton had been a teacher before he took up pure research. He knew how to catch attention if given a chance. On the table in front of the President he dealt his papers like a card dealer, saying as he spread the sequence, "The tables of coordinate tidal records. The sequences of maxima. The graph curve plotted to show the angle of acceleration."

Place was used to complicated documents. He grunted at Number One, said "Um" to Number Two. At Number Three he began to tap his lower teeth with his thumbnail—an infallible sign he was interested.

"Why haven't we all heard of this before?"

Skelton was ready for that. "I was puzzled, too. The effect is show-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing most down at our place where we have better instruments. But before trying to see you, I visited a number of other marine labs. The effect can be traced in their tables—not so clearly, but it's already appearing. But, as there's no explanation, no one wants to take notice of it till they know the cause."

Place threw himself back in his chair. "I could, of course, hand you over to another expert who'd completely discredit you. But I won't. What you show here may fit in with something else. I wonder— There, the three-hundredth second's gone. Off you go—no, not out that way—into that small room over there. Shut the door and wait. I think I'll be wanting you, after all."

As the door closed behind Skelton, Place heard the handle of the room's principal door turn. Quickly for a man of his size, he turned the charts over on their faces and turned his own to the main door. His secretary entered.

"He's in," she said. "And he'll be over in a few minutes. What have you done with Dr. Skelton?"

"I've told him to wait. Now give me all the papers I'll need for General Chase."

They went through them together and he spread them on top of the charts. Five minutes later, the secretary ushered in a tall man with the appearance of a rather kindly attorney. He took the chair beside Place's desk.

"Was there anything in it?"

"I've already had the microphotos developed and enlarged."

"You got some shots? But do they show anything?"

For answer the Chief of Staff took an envelope from his wallet pocket and picked out some strips of aerial photos.

The President looked at them. "Yes, you've certainly got something there. That's pretty big building. But surely it wasn't building that you were snooping for. The U.S.S.R.'s always building. Mongolian, I call it—Big Wall and all that nonsense."

"We used to be fond of a bit of building ourselves once." Chase smiled.

"Adolescent ambition: now we want not big dumps but big men. How did you get them and why did you choose just these?"

"The first answer will tell you the second. Everything went according to plan. There was the prepared breakdown of the stratoplane. Even the pilot didn't know we'd arranged that. There was the planned providentialism that a little old three-hundred-and-fifty-an-hour plane was waiting for repairs at Cologne. I cabled I could

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

just make it if I flew in that little old plane directly to Karakorum where His Mongolian Majesty was about to be inaugurated.

"Of course, I was met at the Rhine by the high-up spy Yang had specially sent to me for my outward honor and my inner inspection. He came, as his rank required, with two attendants. So he had me and my two aides under constant surveillance. We went straight ahead and nothing was done to distract our attention from the outlook—scenery's very pleasant from seven thousand feet—we hardly ever see it now.

"But when we were approaching the Urals I noticed my host was getting ready for something. He and his attendants unpacked not only some light refreshments but also were laying out some kind of show for us. He then came over to my seat and asked if I and my aides would not like to look at the actual models of the big inaugural pageant he had brought with him to beguile the tedium of the ride. He told us that no one had seen them outside his office—save, of course, the Supreme Commissar.

"He got out a folding table from his baggage, gathered us round, and he and his two assistants set up the models—pretty little things, they certainly have a gift for that sort of thing—and made this miniature marionette show go through all its dance steps. He explained that lighting would play a great part and fussed about to get it just right, finally saying that the daylight spoiled the effect. So he pulled down the shades on the plane windows and rigged up miniature floodlighting.

"Oh, he took a lot of trouble to please us—so much that the moment he called us into that little huddle I knew he wanted us away from the windows. So, as I had welcomed his offer to display his ingenious little preview, I hung up the fountain pen with which I had been writing till that moment on the little sling that is by each window in that type of plane for one's book, paper, or what-have-you.

"Of course, these photos come from that pen. It's a neat little gadget and it was quite easy to hang it so that it was able to go on taking microfilm every five minutes all the time our obliging escort was keeping us away from the windows. The pen hung very neatly, so it could squint at the landscape through the fine line between the shade and the window jamb."

"Excellent, Chase. But granted these are things they didn't want us to see, do you know what they mean?"

"No. But I agree with you that they may possibly link up with the S.S. report. First, look at these."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Chase took some maps from his portfolio.

"This is the district of Russia we were then flying over. These green crosses show where each photo was taken. Notice this fairly straight red line—it wavers but goes across country fairly well—linking up the green crosses. Notice also that a couple of big rivers flow down and cut across the red line. The red line is the hundred-foot contour line. Where those two big rivers cross the red contour line are two of the largest building projects shown in all the photos."

Place scratched his head. "And at first I thought they were some big power development! Now I get it."

"Mr. President, here's the only link I see. The secret report merely said—because Spy L55 B2 holds a chair at Karakorum he naturally can't report in person or send obvious messages—coastline, contour, changes; and those clues had to be spread through many messages, so it took us some time to be sure."

"Yes, yes, I know all that," the President said impatiently. There was silence for about a minute, broken only by the sound of the President's thumbnail tapping his teeth. Then his mouth opened wide and from it came quietly, but with the greatest conviction, the single word, "Gosh!" He heaved himself up and ambled over to the small door.

"Yes," he said. "It's worthy of Yang. A very neat use of giant power. There's no doubt he's nearly ready for his grand slam."

He threw open the small door and beckoned. "Dr. Skelton, I want you to meet General Chase."

While the two were shaking hands, the President unearthed the charts, arranged them neatly with the map sections, and under them he put the photo strips.

"Now, gentlemen, I have my exhibit ready. Dr. Skelton, I'm sure these will click in your mind. When you have grasped their full significance, as I now understand it, please explain to the General."

Skelton was almost as quick as the President, for here was the cause of his puzzling phenomenon. After all three had been bent over the papers for some minutes, the scientist and the soldier straightened up and looked at the politician. The huge executive was back in his chair.

"I see now," said Chase, his features taut. "But what are you going to do about it?"

"There's only one thing to do. At least, until I've done that I can't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

do anything else, and it might work. I believe, you know, in frontal attacks of frankness."

"What do you mean?" both men asked.

"Send for the Secretary of State, Chase. No, get him on the phone for me. Dr. Skelton, you stay here. Frankness begins at home. I'm going to call this—this bluff—if it is a bluff. But we can at least find out and then—well, we'll see."

As soon as the Secretary of State was on the line, the President told him to come over, but added, "Before you do, leave instructions that a television long-distance conference setup be sent along here at once. At once. It must get here as soon as you do."

The urgency in his voice told. The Secretary of State and the specialists who geared the plant for T.l-d.C's turned up almost together. The Secretary of State sent through his diplomatic code-beam message requesting a conference immediately with the Commissar of Foreign Affairs. In five minutes they were talking.

"Would it be possible for the Supreme Commissar to speak with the President of the United States?"

Another five minutes brought the answer: Yes.

The screens were set, the President with the Secretary of State standing behind him, grouped in their little apse of beams. It was rather like the staging of an old family photograph a century earlier. The two men faced a little semicircular alcove of grey-gleaming, glasslike metal exactly similar to that in which they themselves stood. This curved, dull mirror as they watched it—it looked like a half section of a giant tube—began to gradually become as bright as the niche in which they stood.

Through its vibrating glow figures began to glimmer and waver, then they became steady, colored, stereoscopic. They were as though alive and moving in the room and their voices as clear. Yes, it was Yang in his plain blue-silk robe, and beside him his Commissar of Foreign Affairs.

Place bowed. The Secretary of State made the formal introduction. Yang bowed and in perfect English, though with something of that archaic accent once called Oxford, remarked on the pleasure it gave him to see the President in such good health.

Place countered by hoping that the Commissar of Commissars was in equal health and that the strain of the continued duties to which he had again been called would not tax his energy. Yang

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

smiled and bowed again. Then, without a moment's warning, Place showed his hand.

"I am appealing to you as the world's most powerful man." Yang did not smile; he inclined his head a little and showed he would listen. "I am not going to say anything about what I don't know," continued the President. "I'm not interested in theories and surely I don't want suspicions."

Again Yang bowed, but as he bent his head he kept his eyes on the face of the fat man who from the other side of the earth was trying to get at him. "But," the President went on, "there are some big world facts, facts of climate, that concern us all desperately if they go wrong. I'm asking for cooperation in fact-finding. We're all on this globe together."

Yang's eyelids drooped for a minute. He looked then like those photos which showed him seated receiving the congratulations of the endless Committees of Soviets on St. Joseph's Day. Place realized that he must cut to the center at once.

"We fear—that is, our tidal experts fear—that something on a vast scale may have shifted, gone wrong, and the center of the disturbance may be in your districts."

The President stopped. Yang raised his head. "Did you want to ask anything further?"

"Yes, we want to ask that we get together on this thing and help each other. As I've said, we're on one planet which is more than three-fifths covered by sea. It's our common concern if we are going to lose much more land to the sea—it's our common concern because we are all land-dwelling animals."

Place smiled. Yang's Mongolian features palely reflected a shadow of humor or perhaps of courtesy. Then he was grave, obviously grave. He paused and remarked slowly, "It is kind of you to come so quickly to our assistance on what must have been no more than a rumor. But I will repay generosity with frankness. Yes, we have met with—not a disaster but a reverse—a miscalculation which may exact a greater cost for ultimate gain than we had estimated. One of our most hopeful experiments, undertaken for mankind at large—a global enterprise—has had consequences that some of our experts did not anticipate. On us will fall the weight of the cost.

"This great discovery was to have been given to the world at the next Inaugural—at which I have once more the honor to preside—instead of which it will have to be another challenge to face crisis. But we are brave. We will face our losses and, as the old

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

literature used to say, 'Casting our bread upon the waters and sowing in tears we shall reap in joy, for after many days we shall find a new harvest.' We do not, therefore, ask you to help. We ask only for your sympathy. And your ready inquiry at the first breath of rumor shows that we have that."

Yang rose, bowed, gave a signal with his hand, and the images of himself and his Commissar wavered, became iridescent round the edges, and suddenly on the coving of grey glass there was nothing.

"Can you beat it?" It was the President's voice. "Switch us off," he called. "But can you beat it? Glad of our sympathy, touched by our rushing to his aid. Chase, we're out of date. This is the new war. This makes war obsolete."

"Mr. President." It was the Secretary of State speaking. "Please understand that I don't understand all of this. What's happened? The secret-service report and the return of the Chief of Staff—surely there is no need of such precipitancy! If war is obsolete, diplomacy becomes even more essential."

"Did y'ever hear 'Time and tide wait for no man?' " Place cut in. "That's what we're up against. Did y'ever hear another old wisecrack, 'Between the Devil and the deep sea?'—well, that again describes just where we've been put. Chase, show'm those maps and charts. I must think and think fast. The frontal attack of frankness has failed, been jujitsued by that mealy-mouthed Mongolian."

The silence was disturbed only by the shuffling sound of the charts and maps as Chase and the Secretary of State handled them. Staccato on this whisper came the tapping of the President's thumbnail on his teeth.

"But, Mr. President—" the Secretary of State had turned to the large man filling the chair "—if this preposterous evidence and these three reports mean the same thing—the tidal records, the building preparations on the one-hundred-foot contour line, and the Supreme Commissar's statement—even then we must be circumspect. Why rush to such wild conclusions?

"Granted there has been an unparalleled miscalculation by the U.S.S.R. experts. That may only mean a vast dislocation, perhaps a disaster for *them*. Don't you see, they will be the first to suffer? Diplomacy doesn't make a man an idealist, but it does teach him that men act in the light of their own obvious interests! Why should this master of half the world cut off his nose in the hope that we'll have an attack of sneezing?"

"That's stuff for the papers. Look at those maps again."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well, it's clear he'll lose first and lose more heavily."

"Surely you know your Yang by now? Do I have to remind you that our dear brother doesn't like Russians any more than he likes Americans? Don't you see that he's going to kill a whole covey of birds, drown a whole flock of geese with one flush? Of course, he'll inundate a great deal of Russia, and holy Leningrad will go under the sea where he's long wanted it, and the Moscow river will swallow up the corpses of the two Founding Fathers he's so anxious to have forgotten. And the U.S.S.R. will be turned permanently East—by literally sinking the West! Cortez burned his ships and so conquered Mexico. Yang drowns his bridge to the West and so orientalizes Communism."

"You mean—"

"Do I have to cross the t and dot the i in 'inundation'? It's got a large but neat inevitability about it! Armies, Chase? Why, Pharaoh found himself up against this when he chased Moses into the Red Sea. Armies! Why, they're now no more use than Lewis Carroll's Seven Maids with Seven Mops trying to sweep out the tide. That's exactly it! Can't you get the hang of it? Why, everyone heard of the possibility thirty years and more ago. Don't you see, *he's succeeded in using atomic energy to melt all the frozen tundra and he's well across the Arctic Ocean by now!* Isn't he, Skelton?"

Skelton nodded.

"And as gently as a mother rocking her child to sleep, he'll drown Leningrad—good for him. London, better—New York, best. Yes, and swamp this little burg. Perhaps the Capitol dome will stick out like the Ark on Ararat, but more likely than not fishes will be breeding in the cornices of this very room. Oh, it won't be the sudden rush of a monster tidal wave"—again he looked across to Skelton, who nodded—"it will be quiet as a summer dawn. We'll have time—*time to do nothing!* For nothing can be done to stop it. All we can do is to get ready to bear Yang's brotherly 'Be brave, how I sympathize, I've been through it myself!' "

"Where's diplomacy now? Sunk—with chivalry. What's the use of sending an Army and bombing the U.S.S.R. cities? Will that stop the tide coming in and continuing to rise? Now that it's started, it goes on by itself, this giant melt, like a house once it's well lit continues to burn after the firebug has cleared off."

To the Secretary of State's protest, Skelton added, "The President's right. Everyone interested in geophysics has known that. If you once start the melt—and once you had the atom open you could—then

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you'd upset the cold balance at the Poles. It's simply a hangover of the last Ice Age. Once those packs of ice, and the snow that throws the heat back into the sky, are both melted they won't reform. Yes, we're headed for a warmer and damper place than we ever thought we'd see this side of the grave."

"And we've just got to wait"—it was the President again. "That's what gets me! Oh, yes, I can spend my time becoming the most unpopular President that ever was, telling people that nothing can be done. Nowadays that damns an Executive. He's got to say he could do something about a total eclipse if the people say they want it put off. I'm in a tighter jam than even the last Depression President. I can spend my remaining spell of office moving population to higher land. Go west, young man, go and sit above the one-hundred-foot contour line and then the one-hundred-and-fifty perhaps, and always be ready to move up still a little higher. Hitch your wagon to a star—or at least your pants up to your neck! But I can't guarantee when you'll ever be able to sit down again!

"We'll end like one of those pictures of the Deluge out of the old illustrated Bibles, all that remains of us huddled along the foothills of mountains, looking across the new ocean that once was the plains of the United States. And the U.S.S.R. will be sitting comfortably on the bracing heights of the tablelands of Tibet and China. That's precisely right, isn't it, Skelton?"

"Yes, sir."

"But, Mr. President"—it was the Secretary of State still holding onto his mid-Twentieth Century common sense. "I still can't see that on such a wild gamble Yang could really hope to win—"

"Well, if you will live in the past, go read history. In the dear old days, revolutionaries never minded sinking *half* their own lot if they could drown *all* the other side."

That, though, brought up the Chief of Staff in support of the chief diplomat. "It's a matter of terrain, Mr. President, and as a soldier I don't see that the one-hundred-foot or even the one-hundred-and-fifty-foot depth need sink us so deep as to make all that difference. At the worst, we'll stabilize there. And then we'll be able to talk turkey—trained free men against a flock of frightened and driven slaves. Human nature hasn't changed—the old laws of war won't melt just because the ground is a bit wetter. We'll win!"

The President wheeled on him, but the slam was a kindly one. "You soldiers! Of course you can't surrender. Well, I guess you wouldn't to any man—I give you that. But try to be a modern for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a moment. You're no longer up against Yang. You're up against a power that no one has yet beaten—nature. Nature knocked off its balance and determined to sit down again. Except that now we're in its way! That's all. Yang doesn't count. Get him out of your mind. He was simply the trigger, the blind rat that bored the dike. Only a fool wastes his last precious moments trying to bludgeon the vermin once the water's coming through."

"But it will reach its level, and then—"

"That's what people were saying when the first shower fell after Noah had closed the Ark! You think a President is simply a man who has the first ringside seat at the political circus to watch the interminable act called 'Which Way Will the Cat Jump?' That *was*, maybe, but now it isn't. President now means the man who sits in front. D'you suppose I'd have tumbled to this ahead of all of you if the bare notion hadn't ever crossed my mind before? Do you suppose a man who has to, and likes"—he shot a sudden grin across to Skelton—"to listen to experts never puts all their twos and twos together and never gets some very odd and big answers in consequence?

"Well, I'll tell you what this has confirmed for me—it's the confirmation of two big beliefs that have been forming in my mind for some time. But now they're no longer beliefs, they're facts. First: Armies are gone! Oh, yes, we still have terrain, we still can maneuver on it. But—" and his voice rose "—now we march, wheel, and deal in the vastest game of strategy man has ever played, and we play it with entirely mobilized peoples. And we play it against nature itself! We, a land animal and incurable air-breather, play it against wholesale drowning. No wonder history begins with the story of man's fight with a world-drowning flood! This is the real ordeal, not by battle—that was a mere interlude—but the early first form, by water.

"Yang, like an old wizard—see how the last science and the first myth have at last met—has challenged us to a trial of skills, of magics, and the loser is to be swept off the face of the land, sunk for good and all. You're still hoping that the Deluge will be only a demi-deluge. I'm not. No, I'm not going to be deluded by a vain hope. I've told you, I've seen two of my most secret and awkward beliefs come true. I've told you one—that Armies are gone. They're no more use than human sacrifice so far as changing events are concerned.

"Now I'll tell you the second—why Armies will never have a chance again, why we'll never get a chance to get our second breath,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

why in fact Yang chose to do this, to put us at this hour on this spot. Because he's calculated that *he's* got the terrain! He'll lose, of course—prodigiously. And you'll concede that he won't care so long as we lose *more*. And here I'm on his side, so far as reckoning goes. He's right. A President, if he's a real one, spends quite as much time with maps as with men. Maps, proper maps, are just the other side of the man problem. Here, look at these, here in my desk drawer—"

And he whisked open a wide, shallow drawer and drew out a layer of colored maps.

"These show heights. That great span of brown is the huge area of Tibet stretching away to the Pamirs and the Samarkand region and out over to the Gobi and Central China and upper Burma. That's the one great tableland of the world. The Pivot of the World, don't geologists and geophysicists call it?"

"Yes, sir," confirmed Skelton.

"It holds up no-one-knows-how-much water locked as ice, and when melted off it will be one of the richest areas in the whole earth. So, you see, Yang has huge areas to move onto and fresh waters to release, waters that will flow of themselves as the temperature rises when the Arctic is thawed—he won't even have to waste another atom bomb on his own highlands.

"Secondly, not only has he the highland of the world and we the low, but I've studied what happens when water really gets going. Of course, if the water alone had to mount, perhaps it wouldn't go above the one-hundred-and-fifty-foot line. But that's not the way things actually work in this delicately balanced world of ours that seems so solid. Why, there are situations in which even my feather-weight might make a difference! When I was looking after some big coastal reclamation jobs—in my first Cabinet post—I saw the read-ings. When quite a shallow tide comes into a channel, the sea floor actually sinks under the weight—isn't that so?"

"Yes, the effect was first measured on the floor of the English Channel," the expert confirmed.

"When the tide comes in for good, the ground cooperates—for good. It founders, just like a ship. Mark me, we're in for a real subsidence, to match the actual inundation. The two'll play into each other's hands. The Ministers'll say, 'The earth is washing her hands of us.' Perhaps they're right. We're certainly none too clean a lot." Then he roused himself. "Well, here's my message—decode it if you can: I'm Bulling the Ocean and Bearing the Land, in this biggest gamble in all history!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There was a grim silence. Then General Chase pointed to one of the maps. "But if you're right and the seas' appetite will grow with land eating, won't Yang's new harbors, as shown on these photos of mine, go under, too?"

"He has probably calculated on that. Cold-blooded brute, he wouldn't care! For all we can see, these may be simply sham buildings to make Yang's people feel safe until they, too, founder with everyone else under the two-hundred-, three-hundred-, or four-hundred-foot line, while himself and his hordes enjoy the increasingly salubrious uplands of Tibet and its wide outskirts. For one thing is plain: every inch that the water mounts over us leaves *him* ten miles or more of ice and snowfield nicely thawed out and henceforward blossoming under a mild and friendly sky."

They turned to Skelton.

"True enough," Skelton nodded, "there'll probably be no more snow in the world's middle regions for good. Every glacier will gush down floods, every snowpeak shoot down its ice sheet into the puddle *we'll* be in. Yes, the climate for those who can keep their heads above water is most promising."

The Secretary of State was no longer protesting. He mopped his forehead, saying over and over, "And *no* way out!"

"We're driven in, wings and center!" echoed the General.

But that last phrase somehow roused the big man.

"What are you saying?" he questioned in an almost absent-minded way. Evidently something had been started in his mind. They waited, but all they could hear him saying, and evidently to himself, was: "Wings Center." Then suddenly he lit up. "You said Wings and Center, didn't you?"

He had turned to Chase who had nodded, puzzled.

"Doesn't that make you recall something? Don't you remember hearing of that as a boy? Don't you know that because of that, when we all had our backs to the wall in the First World War, we decided to make one man have one chance to pull us out? And it was because he had said just that?"

"I remember what you're recalling," said Chase. "It's the phrase, isn't it, 'My left wing is driven in, my right wing is driven back, my center can't hold—I advance!' "

"That's it. Don't you see?"

The other three, Skelton included, looked blank, even dismayed. Had optimism made this big man incapable even of acknowledging defeat by nature itself? But his next remark was cool enough.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"True, it came to me in a flash. I'm not saying there's a way out. But I am saying that there could be a way *on*—if we have the nerve. If the people will follow a really daring lead. I mean something can be done and, by all the Founding Fathers, I'm not going to stand on this sinking land and just let the people founder! Something *can* be done and I'll do it!"

He was speaking with command. They gathered round. He was now quite the coolest of the foursome. He took a large sheet of blank paper and spread it on the desk.

He picked up two pencils—one with red lead, the second with green. The other three gathered round the huge man, who quickly sketched a rough-outline map of the world. Then he drew in heavy, wavy lines of color. The silence showed the degree of attention he had aroused.

Then the President spoke. "The green lines show the coastline as it will be when the present melt has all flowed out into the oceans and the red lines show—well, the other possibility. Am I correct, Dr. Skelton?"

"Mr. President, I couldn't chart a more accurate prognosis myself."

The other two turned to the big man in the chair. "But you can't! You mustn't! It's absolutely out of the question!"

"Can't! That from a soldier? Mustn't! From a diplomat?" The President was in full bellow. "I tell you, there's just one thing I can't and won't do, and that's to tell the people I can't do anything! I'm irreplaceable because in every jam I have done *something!* Don't any of you know the ABC of politics? I've got a chance to do something—to put the initiative back into the hands of the U.S.—and by hell and high water, I'm going to do it! And my last word is this—my p.s. to the code message I gave you a moment back. By and large, I'm still Bearing the Land, but now I'm betting Yang will get a new ocean and I'll get a new land!"

He gave them a moment, sitting back in his chair glaring up at them. Yes, he was right, he knew—the man who has something to suggest, a line to take, however wild that line, always wins against those who say you can only knuckle down under it.

"Skelton," he called, "sit down on the other side of this desk and figure out what force it would need! You can, can't you?"

"Yes, that's pretty simple. The rough figure's been known for quite a long time both for the power needed and the mass to be reduced. Just give me a few minutes."

Place handed him all the charts. The others waited, standing on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

each side of Place's chair. The tap of Skelton's pencil on one side of the desk and of the President's thumbnail on the other made a pair of miniature tattoos.

In a few minutes, Skelton handed a sheet of paper over the desk. Place looked at it and then passed it over to the Chief of Staff, saying, "There are your instructions. Figure out at once how many you'll need—and don't spare the planes. Have 'em posted with sealed orders and a zero hour for taking off when I give the signal."

His ascendency was now complete. General Chase bowed.

"Ring me up as soon as you're ready," the President nodded him toward the door, then, turning to the Secretary of State, said, "Get the ambassadors together at once—here. I'm going to give 'em a conference—one for the books, the history books."

When the Secretary of State was gone, Place disposed of his third guest. "Thanks," he said. "Your visit was worth three hundred seconds. Now all you have to do is keep your mouth shut and forget you were ever here. My secretary will get you out."

So that's the great man, thought the bewildered researcher as the private elevator sank him to ground-floor level. As long as he can do something, he's just as gay as a bird.

Left alone, the President yawned, looked down on his huge bulk, remarked in a whisper, "'Weight must be still going up," then, with a chuckle, "Well, the fatter you are the better you float." Then he swung himself forward, took a pencil, and began to jot down notes.

A few moments later, with his head on one side, he spoke over a passage or two, nodded, again muttering to himself. "Can't see it's worse than the Gettysburg Address. Place, my boy, you may sink physically, but you're up for a high place in history. Time's ever-rolling tide will have to roll quite a bit before it'll drown you!" He smiled, and when the desk phone buzzed he said in high spirits, "Let 'em all in!"

Shortly after, the Secretary of State appeared, the first of their Excellencies began to report. Place had chairs ready for them. It would be quite a meeting. Evidently they had sensed something big was afoot. All the chairs filled rapidly. Place had told the Secretary of State to make an urgent appeal for their presence.

Now the Secretary of State rose and told the meeting that the President had called them because he wished to confide information which concerned them as much as himself. It was regrettable that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the Ambassador of the U.S.S.R. couldn't be present—he had just been called home. "But we have a quorum," the Secretary smiled, and sat down.

Certainly the President's address interested them—so much so that probably the peroration, which to him was the part he prized most, they hardly remembered when they got outside. Even their own phrases, in which they had tried with diplomatic correctitude to hide their reactions, now seemed hardly worth putting in their diaries-for-memoirs. But they were quite good in their way and characteristic. The British ambassador was, of course, called on first, since he was the Hyphen leading to the rest. Lord Blasket at the moment thought he was doing pretty well with, "Well, Britannia's always ruled the waves and, by George, now she'll do it in earnest."

The Italian confessed that he wished he had someone more worthy to speak on such a theme. "Ah," he said, "if only now we could hear Savonarola himself! What a sermon the dread Fratre of San Marco would give us on his favorite text, then directed only against the French." He looked lightly at his Gallic colleague. " 'Behold I bring a flood of waters on the earth!' "

It was a good enough *bon mot.* But the *mot juste* belonged, of right, to the Frenchman. "Gentlemen, we have lived to surpass the Bourbons. After all, the famous phrase of Louis Quinze was mainly a phrase of inflation. But now we shall put real water into *Après moi, le deluge.*"

When the Secretary of State had ushered them out to make their reports to their governments, he came back for a moment with his chief.

"They took it quietly."

"Well, there's time. People will get used to anything if you give 'em time and something to do in the spell between. I've given them the timetable for the upper line I drew on the map. Europeans are getting used to being milled this way and dumped that way. It'll only be one more population shift."

He was restless, though, and when his desk phone buzzed again, he took it hastily. "Yes, Chase? Yes, everything's set here. Now give the zero hour at nine P.M. tonight. Weather's all right at the farther objective? Good, good, just my luck again. And good enough in the other direction? Good—that's all." He hung up and turned to the Secretary of State. "Now get me a worldwide hookup and full network. I'll have what I want to say ready in twenty minutes. Isn't much to say. I just want to polish a period or two—this won't be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

forgotten readily. Better leave something worth writing into the record!"

If he had felt misgivings, the cloud had gone and already he was jotting down some fresh phrases as the Secretary of State left the room. He only stopped when the microphones and their attendants entered. The full TAV—Tel. Aud. Vis.—setup was deployed around him. The flashes had been going out for twenty minutes, calling to the world to *Listen, urgent! Listen, urgent! Washington has a key message. The President's going to speak to the world!*

Place's speech began:

"Peoples of the earth, this is an earth proposition. I'm speaking not for one people but for all—for mankind. This isn't a time for comments. It's for information—not for rumor or recrimination, but for facts. I'm speaking to you right across frontiers, not because I'm President of the United States but because I know what you've got to know—and right now. I'm speaking over all frontiers because the frontiers are going, are melting, are being sunk. The very geography you've known, that mankind's always known, is at this very moment being wiped off like old lines on a slate. We can't try to put things back—that's impossible. All that's gone for good. We can't look back—we've got to go on."

He then told the world briefly that the Arctic Sea icefield was melting, the huge Tundra of the Obi subarctic land-mass had already been thawed. The tides would gradually inundate all the Atlantic seaboards for a depth of at least eighty feet and probably one hundred, and this would then spread into the Pacific. These new sea-level heights would remain, be permanent. Every country therefore would shrink and men must move gradually onto the higher land. Their present ports would all be submerged.

"The U.S.S.R.," he went on, "has pointed the way. They have prepared against a rainy day. They have built fine harbors in what till now was far inland. We must do the same."

Up to this point he had spoken with the quietness of a man demonstrating a proposition about which there is no controversy. Now his tone changed.

"I have to report to you that, although we have been slow, now we have followed suit and I can assure you that we have made"—he paused—"a reply which puts us ahead once more. When I have ceased speaking, look at your maps. You are now involved in a world

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

proposition and must think as Mankind, Unlimited—unlimited, at least, in a common liability."

His voice became strident. "Look at your maps!" He picked up his own hand-drawn one, held it against him so that the world could see it on his chest. "Look: the U.S.S.R. will have now a vast tableland on which to rest while you of the coastlines must flee and shelter on mere spines of countryside, standing out above interminable lagoons. I am determined, I *have* already adjusted, the balance of the old world in the new. *Our planes are already blasting the Greenland Ice Cap.*

"What does that mean? Why have I done that? It is the first phase of our answer. We have been challenged—challenged to see whether we, the free peoples, could stand the test, could endure the ordeal of facing the unleashed powers of nature. We were said to be soft. We were told that if we were really cornered, we would drown tamely like sunk rats.

"Well, we have taken up the challenge. We will not only go as far as we have been dared, we will go farther. The Greenland Ice Cap is six thousand feet thick and has stored in it enough water to raise the sea level again, even beyond our challenger's calculations, and inundate even more of their lands and ours. For not only will all that subcontinent pile of ice come out into the seas in a new deluge—I am not using rhetoric, I am stating immediate fact—Greenland itself will rise. At present—but for only a little more—it lies bent, buckled, and sunk under its load of gargantuan iceberg. Lift that weight and inevitably it will rear itself up as the coast of Norway rose and is still rising from the same cause and"—his voice deepened—"mark well the corollary: from the very same cause our American ports on the south shores of the Great Lakes are getting deeper.

"You see, my friends, not only is Greenland pouring a deluge to raise the ocean flood still higher, but as Greenland rears itself up, all these lands of ours to the south of Greenland will sink! Every plain of the world will be awash—but ours will founder deepest.

"So much for my first stroke. Have I not proved that we, the free peoples, when dared to show if we have courage, can snatch the initiative?"

He changed tone for an even deeper emphasis. "For, have no doubt of what I'm saying to you, we shall win because we know what we are doing; because we know, better than those who called for this showdown, what we are facing. *This is the end of man against man!*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I know you are surprised at my saying that, but I know what I am saying.

"Our challenger has, I give him that, changed the whole story of man. We thought we were done with nature and henceforward it—or He—would sit back and do no more than give us obediently the tools and arms we called for to beat each other down. Well, our materialistic friend has decided to call back nature and to make the test, for us and for his side, which of us dares face that Power which he believes to be dead or blind and which I believe to be alive and all-seeing.

"Yes, the story has been changed, and it has been changed, I have a sure belief, in favor of those who have faith. Natural selection is back again, and that branch of the species shall survive which responds most creatively to the new conditions. That means, in short: which branch will now have the greater daring? Which branch has more faith that nature, the Creative Power, offers a new vision to those who have the eye of faith? Crisis is the code word for opportunity. And on your behalf I have seized it."

He swung back into his swift narrative style. "I have bombed Greenland and at this moment it is pouring out its piled-up frozen waters and is itself rising like new bread. But that is only a beginning—the first phase of my reply, just an earnest of our full intention."

All this while he had spoken so that his huge figure appeared to the hundreds of millions in their television sets framed on a square screen of pale grey. It made a fine background on which his every gesture told. But now, suddenly, he stood aside. He had put himself alongside the screen, and like a huge caryatid he framed one side of it while his huge arm and hand ran along the screen's top. With his fingers he pointed down at the empty area and his voice called out, "Look!"

The screen began to darken, but the room in which he stood darkened even more swiftly, until he stood in a twilight, a vast portal figure pointing them to attend. A moment later and the voice out of the still thicker dusk boomed, "Watch!"

At the top of the screen, now deeply twilit, appeared a small constellation of bright points which rapidly spread into a line. "That line," went on the voice, "is really a vast circle seen sideways. You are being shown by relayed television one of the greatest maneuvers ever executed. Now wait!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There was a space of silence in which the moan of distant airplane motors could faintly be heard. Then for a moment, sight made the hundreds of millions cease to listen. For they saw that the base of the screen had suddenly taken fire. A score of huge fountains of flame leaped up, bursting into great blossoms of incandescence. At the top of the screen the small dots of light rocked, whirled, and spun like sparks above a bonfire. The field of vision on the screen itself heaved and swung. A modulated roar came through all the sets, and riding on that ground bass could be heard the President's voice as if giving speech to the thunder.

"You have just witnessed the greatest human act in history. You have seen the unveiling of a new continent, one that slept in ice until, for your sake and need, I have been permitted to call it to awake. You have been present visually at the baptism of fire whereby this new continent has become a living land. At this moment and in your presence, I christen it the Homeland of All the Earth's Free Peoples, the cradle of a new and greater democracy, the capital of a civilization of liberty and brotherhood."

The apocalyptic vision on the screen rocked, whirled, and vanished. The lights rose again and his familiar friendly figure stood as before in front of the empty lit field. His tone was as friendly. "That mysterious land, the true Dark Continent, which you just saw coming to light—it has been awaiting this moment.

"Hidden under its vast load of ice it has been kept by nature until at this hour He offers it, a new land, a new world, more new than America was to our Pilgrim Fathers. Today it is granted to those who are most free to dare, to believe—to us. At this moment I stand with you on a Pisgah greater than that on which Moses stood, and you and I are looking out over a promised land infinitely richer, more promised and promising, than that he saw when he glimpsed Canaan.

"Our Jordan is the ocean and the ice, and already the Ark of atomic energy has gone forward in front of you and the ice flood that barred you from your new home of promise is rushing away from before your feet. Go up and possess it! There I shall move your capital. Already there are emerging mountains and noble valleys, fiords, and tablelands. There are volcanic ranges pouring rich fertilizers on that already rich and unexploited soil. There lie minerals of all sorts and numberless radioactive lodes. And Heaven itself has cast upon it a blessing from above. For the mysterious cosmic radiation pours in most fully at the Poles, and so on this, the one great

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

polar land-mass, now freed of ice, will come in that invisible light which alone can make plants and animals mutate and so give rise to endless new varieties, more fertile, more productive.

"There living will be far richer, and once the price has been paid and the great trek made, there life will be far happier and easier than man has ever known. That is your land, your home! That is the prize which I bring to you from this supercontest to which we have been called, to which we have replied, to which we have risen!"

He paused, for he knew the exact time to let such stunning news sink into men's minds, for them to see the way he was pointing. And when he judged, with his perfect sense of timing, that they were reacting and rising to the query point, he struck again.

"You say too good to be true. What about the polar night? I promise you, the ice will never reform. I promise you I would never have begun this thing. You now know, you now can judge, on whose shoulders that responsibility lies. This proud man, Yang—prouder than Xerxes, for Xerxes only strove to bind a small arm of the sea—this Super Shah has bid the ocean itself rise from its bed, pass those shores where, as Scripture says, 'its proud waves shall be stayed, and inundate all the coasts of earth, the ancient habitations of mankind.'

"But I have taken his bid, I have doubled the bid, I have outbid him! In this final auction of the continents I have made the winning bid, and to Yang is given only an ocean, the Arctic Ocean, which he has made ravenous and which will gnaw at his coasts. While to us is given a new continent. His central uplands on which he counted for his own security are lost to him already. For now that the vast masses of ice from Antarctica will add vastly to the Flood, the whole climate of this planet will change. Snow will become a myth. Instead there will be warm rains and fabulous fogs. Not, though, with us at our safe retreat. But for him, his temperate zone areas—look at your maps—will be wrapped in perpetual fog and enervating steam.

"For there is going to rise round his earth's middle a tropic belt beyond anything the world has ever seen since the Age of the Saurians. It will girdle the world from Capricorn to Cancer. It will be an impenetrable jungle, a final wall between our paradise and his choice."

He counted ten slowly to himself in silence and then his amazing voice hit an even deeper register. "Therefore I now claim for you this New Land and lead you to this, the path of peace—you the free peoples for whom I, the President of the United States, stand as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

trustee. And I now name this New Land the territory of the United States—the central homeland of the democratic peoples of the earth."

He paused to let his last statement achieve its full reaction, watching the small fluctuating green line in the liquid-filled disk-dial that showed, with its climbing miniature staircase, the piling-up number of sets that were listening to him. Yes, he had the ear of half the world—his half of the world. So he swung vibrantly into his peroration.

"In the name of the Pilgrim Fathers, I call upon you to rise and harness yourselves, to go forth on this new and greater pilgrimage. In the immortal words which henceforward will have a still higher overtone of triumph, I say—*Let us go forward in our great task that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.*"

Editorial Note (Ellery Queen, 1970): One of the objections to Mr. Heard's story when it first appeared was that it wasn't a detective story at all. We had anticipated the possibility of such a reaction and on the story's publication had tried to nip the criticism in the bud (unsuccessfully, we might say). Here are parts of what we wrote, half defense, half explanation, as long ago as 1947, and a few thoughts 23 years after:

If you are a purist who believes unalterably that a detective story, to warrant that classification, must follow an inviolable pattern (crime, investigation, suspicion, and final denouement), if you measure a detective story only by strict formula, then Mr. Heard's story may not *seem* to qualify. But there is no reason why the detective story should be shackled by tradition or by the mere mechanics of technique: a fine craftsman should be privileged, even encouraged, to break *any* rule if by so doing he builds a better murder-trap. And that is what we thought (and still think) Mr. Heard did in 1947.

Mr. Heard placed his story thirty years in the future (1977). He asked readers to imagine that the people of this country will have matured sufficiently to elect as the President of the United States a man who is not only a politician but a trained scientist as well. Surely, in this technological age, that is not too much to ask of the imagination.

Once you have accepted this premise, the detective story is no longer the slave of arbitrary rules or even of established principles;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it has wings; it soars; it is jet-propelled. Now we can see more clearly that Mr. Heard's story merely *extended* the old concepts. Is there a crime? Yes. True, it is no longer murder of an individual, or even mass murder on a small scale; it is the premeditated murder of—literally—millions of people. Even more than that, it is the murder of a nation—of a continent—of a civilization.

In the classic pattern the commission of a crime (or the threat of it) is followed by investigation. Does Mr. Heard's detective investigate? Again—yes. President Place uses his executive office as a superdetective agency. His operatives are not mere gumshoemen, circa 1947: they are highly placed, responsible officials of the government—the Chief of Staff, the Secretary of State, and other Cabinet members. The President himself is the active head of the agency: he senses the danger, mobilizes his forces, assigns investigations to his operatives, gathers the evidence, interprets the clues, deduces the nature of the crime, tightens the net of suspicion, pins the guilt on the "concealed" culprit, and finally takes those steps necessary to thwart the criminal.

Has a single element of pure detective-story technique been violated? Isn't the President of the United States a detective in an expanded sense of the original concept, a larger realization of that concept?

You say the story is still, after more than twenty years, science fiction rather than detective fiction? *Fiction!* The way the world is going? Who knows what the detective story will be thirty years from now? The credibility gap between science fiction and science reality has narrowed extraordinarily since 1947. Won't the criminological gap between detective fiction and detective reality narrow just as phenomenally? Could it be, as we said in the beginning, that Messrs. Heard and Queen were too far ahead of the times? Perhaps we'll know in 1977.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a ***NEW*** short story by

GEORGE BAXT

"This film you want to do about my husband," Naomi asked Andrew Somers, "it's not based on any of those awful books written about him, is it?"

"No, it's based on my own research—close to three years of it."

"Why are you so obsessed with my husband?"

"I'm obsessed with his story."

"And I suppose you, too, have a theory as to who murdered him?"

"Hollywood murdered him."

George Baxt writing about the precarious world of entertainment and entertainers he knows so well . . .

UNREASONABLE FACSIMILE

by GEORGE BAXT

Andrew Somers carefully piloted his Mercedes Benz up the winding driveway that led to the fabled palace of Naomi Lawes. He drove slowly, marshaling his thoughts. How does one deal with a legend? he wondered—as he had been wondering ever since she had consented to see him. Naomi Lawes, as famous a legend as Garbo, Dietrich, and Rae Dawn Chong. In the early Nineteen Forties, Naomi accomplished a coup that made Hollywood history. She succeeded in winning the heart of the so-called "boy wonder" of films, Erwin Lawes.

In his early twenties, Erwin had been appointed head of the faltering Majestic Films and filmdom scoffed and laughed and circulated scurrilous jokes about the slender, fragile young man from Jersey City. "Jersey City!" exclaimed Joan Crawford in the powder

© 1991 by George Baxt.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

room of the Mocambo nightclub. "You'd think he'd have the class to claim someplace ritzy for his birthplace. But Jersey City!" Miss Crawford had long ago developed amnesia as to her own lowly origins.

But Erwin Lawes had the last laugh. Within two years of his shrewd guidance and management, Majestic Films ground out box-office smash after box-office smash, and a few were in good taste. He took talentless nobodies and seemingly overnight developed them into talentless somebodies. He found Naomi Gribble in an amateur production of *Rain*, John Colton's adaptation of W. Somerset Maugham's short story, "Miss Thompson," in a tiny theater off Sunset Boulevard. Within a year, Naomi rose from bits and walk-ons to featured roles in "A" productions interspersed with leads in a number of low-budgeted "B"s. Naomi didn't have to know how to act—it was enough that the camera loved her. She photographed magnificently. She was also great in bed. So Erwin married her.

To no one's surprise, she changed Naomi Gribble to Naomi Lawes, and under her husband's careful and relentless supervision she starred and triumphed in a series of films that secured her position in the pantheon of film greats. Naomi as Camille, Naomi as Carmen, Naomi as Joan of Arc, Naomi as Madame DuBarry, Naomi as Mary Magdalene, Naomi as any character she wished to play.

Then the tragedy that brought about the ruination of Majestic Films and the permanent retirement of Naomi Lawes. One February night, an intruder broke into the Lawes palace (Erwin had imported it brick by brick from Italy as a wedding present for his bride) and brutally stabbed Erwin to death while his beloved wife slept in her suite across the hall from his. The coroner counted twenty-eight knife wounds and clucked his tongue each time he repeated the number. Naomi suffered a nervous breakdown and was sequestered in a sanitarium for over three months. When she recovered her senses, she found herself to be an incredibly wealthy widow.

The film industry was amazed she made no attempt to resume her career. In one of her rare interviews (given to Louella Parsons or else) she said, "Without Erwin, I'm nothing. Without his love and reassurance and brilliant guidance, there is no future for me in films any more. Yes, I did just receive an offer but I'll be damned if I'll play Rita Hayworth's mother."

The murderer was never apprehended and the case remained open in the annals of the Los Angeles Police Department. After the san-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

itarium, Naomi went into seclusion for more than a year, taking up knitting, crossword puzzles, chinese checkers, and vodka daiquiris. Eventually and gradually, Naomi emerged from her self-imposed exile and allowed herself a few romantic flings—with a used-car salesman, a tennis instructor (she was crazy about his underhand), a chauffeur, and a Seventh Day Adventist. And so the years went by. Her wealth accumulated, thanks to shrewd management by her brokers and lawyers. Time treated her face and her body kindly.

Andrew Somers couldn't believe that this gorgeous creature mixing the vodka martinis was sixty years of age, give or take a few minutes. He couldn't believe the Tintoretto, the Gauguin, the Van Gogh, and the other masters in the room were authentic—but she reassured him. "They're about the only things in this town that aren't fakes." She poured the drinks, handing him one and taking one for herself, and then draped herself artistically on a sofa without spilling a drop of her martini.

"I've seen some of your films, Mr. Somers."

"Andrew," he suggested.

"No no no no, let's not get too familiar too soon." He blushed and she found it charming. "As I was saying, I've seen your films and they're quite good. I think Erwin, God rest his soul, were he alive today and in a projection room, would also approve of them."

"You're very kind."

"Not always." She sipped her drink. "This film you'd like to do about my husband, it's not based on any of those awful books written about him, is it?"

"No, it's based on my own research—close to three years of it."

"Why are you so obsessed with my husband?"

"I'm obsessed with his story."

"And I suppose you, too, have a theory as to who murdered him?"

"Hollywood murdered him."

She arched an eyebrow cynically. "You think the entire community should be put on trial for murdering Erwin?"

"I think it was someone envious of his success and vaunted position who killed him."

She placed her drink on the coffee table that separated them and commented melodically, "What an interesting theory. You know, you just might be right. David O. Selznick hated his guts. Likewise Darryl Zanuck."

"I'm sure it was some other psychopath."

Naomi toyed with a diamond-and-emerald bracelet. "Who do you

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have in mind to play Erwin? DeNiro? Beatty? Costner? —Mick Jagger?"

"I want an unknown."

She looked over his head at nothing in particular. "An unknown. That's what I was when Erwin discovered me and molded me into a legendary superstar." She nailed him with her eyes. "Do you have a script?"

"A very-sketchy one. It needs to be fleshed out." He paused dramatically. "I desperately need your cooperation."

"And if I don't give it, you'll go right ahead with some cock-and-bull fiction you'll concoct to please the prurient. You can do anything you want with Erwin's life—it's in the public domain, I can't stop you—but you can't use Naomi Lawes without the consent of Naomi Lawes." He didn't know what to make of the strange smile on her face. Then she said abruptly, "Michelle Pfeiffer will have to play me. She's one of the few female names around today who has the right to call herself a star."

She didn't hear Andrew's heart singing. "I repeat, Mr. Somers, I admire your work. And sooner or later, in my time or after, some hotshot will do the story and it will be shabby, distorted, synthetic, and a pack of perverted lies. I've discussed you with my lawyers. They agree that you're probably the only hyphenate in this town we could possibly trust with the project." Andrew was a producer-director—hence the term "hyphenate."

"Subject to certain conditions."

The smile froze. "What are the conditions?"

She stood up and paced the room, which was slightly smaller than a Roman amphitheater. "I want reasonable script control." Before he could remonstrate, she added: "I can assure you I'll be reasonable. I always have been, even when I had the power not to be."

Andrew had it on good authority that she had rarely pulled rank when she was the queen of the Majestic lot. "I'll understand when you have to add icing to the cake," she said. "But two things I positively demand."

Andrew foresaw what was coming and was prepared for it.

"I want approval of the actress who plays me, and I want to select the unknown who plays Erwin. And once we find him—" she was seated again for a refreshing sip of her martini "—I want to work with him before he goes before the camera. I want to help him recreate Erwin, Erwin as I knew him, Erwin as no one else knew him, not even his dominating ogre of a mother or his mistresses."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Andrew coughed.

"I'm sure you've heard of his mistresses, real and apocryphal. It will mean this actor will have to come and live here with me. But I can assure you, Mr. Somers, that when I hand over the finished product to you you'll see a performance that will be nothing less than earth-shattering. He will also win an Academy Award." She swallowed more of the martini. "I'm sure you'd like some time to think this over."

"I don't have to," Somers told her. "I foresaw your conditions. I agree to them."

She laughed. "So few producer-directors are prescient. If they were, they'd invest their money wisely. Now then, who's this young unknown you have in mind to play Erwin?"

"What?" He was blushing again.

"You were so firm about an unknown playing Erwin, it was patently obvious you had someone in mind." She tossed her head impatiently. "Come, come, who is this young man and where did you find him?"

Somers exhaled and said, "I found him waiting table at Orso's. And Miss Lawes, the resemblance to your husband is uncanny. Truly uncanny."

"How old is he?"

"Twenty-three."

"Just the age Erwin was when he took over control of Majestic. How tall is he?"

"Five feet eight inches."

"He's also the right height. What's his name?"

"Murray Carewe. He's appearing weekends in Inglewood in a revival of *Outward Bound*. He plays John, the young would-be suicide."

"Take me to see him on Friday night. But don't tell him I'll be in the audience."

"It's a very small theater. Only ninety-nine seats. He might catch a glimpse of you and recognize you. I've shown him photographs of you and your husband."

"An actor who sneaks a look at his audience is not a very professional actor," she commented imperiously. "I trust your Murray Carewe is above such unprofessional behavior—Andrew."

"I'm sure he is."

"Good. If I like him, we'll take him to supper after the performance . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It had been years since Naomi Lawes was astonished, but when Murray Carewe made his entrance in the play Somers heard her sudden intake of breath. Naomi clutched her handbag tightly. When Murray spoke, it wasn't the voice of Erwin Lawes but it had that soft, romantic, vulnerable quality that had drawn her to Erwin. Carewe's looks were very plain and ordinary, but his personality was as overpowering as that of the late Erwin Lawes, whose looks had also been very plain and ordinary. Somers heard her whisper, "Oh, my God."

Naomi couldn't resist suggesting Orso's for supper. She knew it would delight the young man to be the envy of the other waiters and waitresses, most of whom would go through life waiting for *that* job interview or *that* call back or *that* invitation to dine with the celebrated Andrew Somers and the legendary film star of yesteryear, Naomi Lawes.

When the drinks had been served, Naomi said to the nervous young actor, "Your resemblance to my late husband is quite remarkable. I'm wondering if he might have had an affair with your mother."

"Only if he's ever been to Hammond, Indiana."

Naomi laughed. "I'm positive he'd never been there."

"And I'm positive my mother's never been West."

The evening went swimmingly. Murray, much to the surprise of the restaurant staff who knew his passion for gin and bitters, kept his intake of spirits wisely to two glasses of wine. He didn't protest when told he'd be expected to take up residence with the actress while she trained him.

Naomi said, "There will be gossip, of course, but gossip is the backbone of the film industry and it can only help whet interest in the film. I'm sure Andrew agrees."

Andrew agreed.

"Murray," Naomi went on, "I think you should move in as quickly as possible while Andrew sets to work fleshing out the script."

She said to Murray, "It's going to be very strange reliving this part of my life. Not everyone is given a chance to relive a part of their life. But then, I've always been more or less privileged."

The Sunday of that weekend, Murray arrived at the palace in his slightly under-the-weather M.G. He was awestruck at the magnificence of the vast estate and could hardly wait to write his beloved

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mother in Hammond, Indiana, who would of course see only the worst in the situation.

Naomi had left Erwin's suite in its original state through the decades following his murder, except to have all traces of the blood and the blood-stained mattress removed. The housekeeper had aired the rooms and replenished them with fresh linens and towels. The bar was stocked with a variety of liquors and there were expensive cigars again in residence in the humidors. Murray was overwhelmed when Naomi led him into the suite, instructing him to call her by her first name as Erwin did and reminding him that she and she alone dealt with the servants. She had instructed him to bring no luggage and no personal belongings, not even anything of sentimental value. In other words, he was to leave every trace of Murray Carewe behind in the loft in West Hollywood he shared with three other aspiring actors.

Within an hour of Murray's arrival, there descended on the suite a tailor and six assistants, in addition to personnel from the best and most expensive male haberdashers in Beverly Hills, who brought with them carloads of shirts, ties, pajamas, hose, dressing gowns, handkerchiefs (which would be suitably monogrammed), etc., from which Naomi selected what she knew would have suited Erwin's tastes. Murray didn't know it then, but he would never again wear a T-shirt or blue jeans torn at the knees.

Once the scene in the suite had been played and Naomi had been reassured by the tailor that he would miraculously whip up Murray's new wardrobe overnight, Naomi began the young man's training in earnest. Before lunch, over a Bloody Mary, Erwin's favorite drink before lunch (but only one), Naomi instructed Murray in Erwin's food preferences.

"Believe it or not, he didn't like anything fancy or gussied up by some imported maniacal chef programmed to run amok in the kitchen. Erwin liked his food either broiled or roasted, never boiled, and God forbid never fried." There go potato chips, thought Murray mournfully. "His fish was always broiled or baked."

"I hate fish."

Naomi stabbed him with her eyes. "You are Erwin Lawes. You love fish. Repeat after me, 'I love fish.' "

Murray mumbled, "I love fish." He prayed it wouldn't be on the menu too often.

"In the morning he liked three-minute eggs with a slice of rye

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

toast and two cups of coffee. He ate a lot of fruit and a lot of vegetables and he had a connoisseur's taste for wine." Murray smiled. Maybe he'd like being Erwin Lawes after all. "He worked six days a week, from eight to fifteen hours a day." She found his look of chagrin charming. "Since you're not producing or directing this picture, I'll trust to your talent as an actor to do justice to that side of Erwin." Murray looked suitably grateful. "Shall we go in to lunch?" Naomi said.

When seated, she taught him the correct use of the silverware. Twice she told him he wasn't eating fast enough. It seems the late Erwin was a vacuum cleaner where food was concerned. "Slop your food."

"What?"

"Let some dip on your shirt. Erwin was a slob."

"Oh."

"No need to look embarrassed. That's what this is all about, turning Murray Carewe into Erwin Lawes. Slop some of that soup over yourself, cream of mushroom slops beautifully."

Murray did as he was told and felt a fool. Then he remembered to ask her, "Do I call you Miss Lawes or do I call you Naomi?"

She said sternly, "Naomi, of course! I'm your wife!"

Later, while Naomi took a nap, Murray reported to Andrew Somers. "Listen, Andrew, I'm not so sure this is going to work."

"From what you've told me and from what she's told me—"

"You spoke to her?"

"Briefly, but she'll be in constant touch. Whatever she teaches you, I need for the script." He laughed. "She says so far you're an excellent student."

"Listen, Andrew. This is not the Erwin Lawes I read up on. I mean, this guy is a mean-mannered, bad-tempered slob of a son of a bitch! Although he dressed beautifully."

Andrew couldn't retain his excitement. "That's what's going to make this one hell of a picture and get you an Academy nomination. Don't you feel it, too?"

"Yeah, sure—sure I do. Listen, keep in constant touch, okay?"

"Of course I will. I'll be dropping by frequently."

The week flew by for Naomi. It crawled for Murray. Naomi was molding him into an Erwin Lawes who was more Jekyll and Hyde than an urbane Hollywood genius. Murray found himself smoking cigars (which he loathed), insulting the servants (which came easily

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

because they were snobbish and overbearing), and where Murray Carewe was unusually neat and hygienic, Murray as Erwin Lawes left his suite in a mess and had to be pleaded with to bathe.

One afternoon Murray managed to sneak away and meet Andrew in a nearby coffee shop. Murray was at the beginning of his third week of rigorous training and feeling on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Somers came right to the point. "What about sex?" Murray stirred his coffee and said nothing. "Didn't they have a sex life?" persisted Somers. "I mean, no sex life, I got no movie. There's got to be sex."

Murray, when he finally spoke, spoke softly. "Sado-masochism."

Somers eyes widened with prurient joy. "He beat her up?"

Murray's eyes teared. "No. She beat the hell out of him." Somers gasped. "She's got all kinds of whips in one of her bedroom closets. Sometimes she tells me I'm an Alaskan husky and when she yells 'Mush!' my back is lacerated! Please, Andrew—please let me out of this. Get Dustin Hoffman. He likes realism."

"No way. By God, this is really terrific. This is Cannes Film Festival stuff. Murray, you're going to make film history."

"If I live that long."

When he returned to the palace, Naomi came hurtling out of the library wearing a voluminous housecoat designed for her years ago by Jean Louis. Her face was an ugly contortion of rage and hatred. "You've been to see that woman again!"

Murray backed away from her toward the staircase leading to the second story. "What woman? I haven't seen any woman!"

"That blonde bitch in Sherman Oaks!"

"I don't know any blonde bitch in Sherman Oaks. I used to know one in Encino, but I haven't seen her in a couple of years." He was racing up the stairs with Naomi in amazingly nimble pursuit.

"Lies, lies, lies! Nothing but lies! No wonder I have to beat you with whips! You're a bad little boy! A bad, bad, bad, bad, bad little boy! I'm tired of you cheating on me! You won't let me have children because you say you're impotent! But that's a lie, too! That blonde bitch has had two abortions and they were yours, both of them were yours!"

"Please, Naomi, control yourself!" he shouted, wishing a servant would appear and interrupt the sordid scene. He ran into his suite, hoping to barricade the door, but she was too quick for him. "For crying out loud, Naomi, this is getting out of hand! I quit! I'm going

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

back to Orso's! I don't want to be Erwin Lawes! You can have him back! *I don't want to be Erwin Lawes!*"

"That's what you always say, you puling little runt! You always wanted to be Clark Gable! Well, wishing won't make it so!"

Andrew Somers had arrived and the butler told him there seemed to be a bit of a domestic difficulty being enacted in the master's suite. Andrew hurried upstairs, realizing that his hunch to come by had been psychic.

"You don't want to be Erwin Lawes?" he heard Naomi screaming. "Very well, Erwin, your wish shall be granted!" From under the folds of the housecoat, she produced a steak knife. "I'm freeing you, Erwin, the way you would never free me. No divorce ever! No children ever! Play parts I never wanted to play! Debase and degrade me into disgusting sado-masochism, robbing me of my identity!" All the time she spoke, she plunged the knife repeatedly into Murray's chest, he having tripped and fallen back on the bed. "You're free, Erwin! You're free!"

Andrew Somers was horrified by the sight of Naomi repeatedly stabbing the young actor. "Stop that! *Stop it!* You're killing Murray!" He wrestled with the maniacal woman, attempting to force her to drop the knife.

"I'm killing *Erwin!* I'm killing Erwin Lawes!"

The knife dropped from her hand to the floor and she stepped back away from the bed, away from the dead young man, away from Andrew Somers. She said in an ugly voice, "I'm tired of being told what to do. I killed *Erwin.*" She turned to Somers with a sly smile. "I should know what I'm doing—" the madness danced in her eyes "—after all, I've killed Erwin Lawes before!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE JURY BOX
by JON L. BREEN

Paradoxically, the most overrated and underrated practitioners of the mystery are sometimes the same writers. Certainly Robert B. Parker is neither as great as his most fervent admirers would claim nor as poor as his most determined detractors would have one believe, and the same is undoubtedly true of such controversial historical figures as S. S. Van Dine and the still-active Mickey Spillane. Another and more recent example of the same phenomenon is Elizabeth George, an American writer of ersatz British mystery novels who made a highly publicized debut in 1988 with *A Great Deliverance*. The book drew extremely laudatory jacket comments (which are expected to be exaggerated beyond reason) followed by some almost equally complimentary reviews (which are expected to be more judicious). The book also drew some negative notices that were more strongly and harshly expressed than they would have been for a first novelist less heavily hyped.

I have not written about *A Great Deliverance* or its successor *Payment in Blood* (1989) because in several efforts I was never able to get past the first couple of chapters of either. I approached the third George novel determined to see it through and decide what all the shouting (pro and con) was about. My conclusion: yes, George's reputation has been outrageously inflated, and her somewhat cumbersome prose style places her many lengths behind such masters of the genuine British detective novel as P. D. James, Ruth Rendell, Anne Perry, and Reginald Hill, not to mention such American equivalents as Sharyn McCrumb and Elizabeth Peters. But on the other hand, bestselling books are usually successful for a reason beyond the hype, and George is well worth reading.

*** Elizabeth George: *Well-Schooled in Murder,* Bantam, $17.95. In their third case, Scotland Yard's aristocratic Thomas Lynley and his working-class partner Barbara Havers investigate the murder of a student who went missing from Bredgar Chambers, a rundown but pretentious independent boarding school. The novel can be recommended for its complex plot, large cast of well drawn characters, and effectively detailed school background. The several emotional sub-plots, though, provide soap-opera breadth rather than "mainstream" depth, and the novel would have been better about a hundred pages shorter. George's use of a British background may have errors to bother the native, but this Anglophile found nary a nit to pick.

**** Anne Perry: *The Face of a Stranger,* Fawcett Columbine, $17.95. Perry departs (temporarily) from her series about Charlotte

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and Thomas Pitt but sticks to a Victorian background, as amnesiac London police detective William Monk tries to solve the murder of Crimean War hero Joscelin Grey while probing the mystery of his own background. The novel has the character depth and sense of period of the author's *Bethlehem Road,* reviewed here last month, with a mystery plot that is even stronger. The only drawback, as with the George novel above, is excessive length: the current trend to longer mysteries is sometimes salutary but more often not.

*** Reginald Hill: *Bones and Silence,* Delacorte, $17.95. In the long-running series about Yorkshire cops Dalziel and Pascoe, Hill makes use, as does Elizabeth George, of the sure-fire situation of a contrasting British sleuthing team. In this one, the crude and irascible Dalziel is roped by a beautiful and charismatic Eurasian director into appearing as God in an amateur production of a York mystery play—and doing Satan opposite him is a man he suspects of murder. In contrast to George's book, the main mystery is only okay, but the delvings into character (centered on a potential suicide who writes anonymous letters to Dalziel) create some insights, not to mention a dramatic climax you're not likely to forget. Two outstanding early cases from the Dalziel/Pascoe series have recently been reprinted (Dell, $3.95 each): *Ruling Passion* (1973) and *A Pinch of Snuff* (1978).

**** Loren D. Estleman: *Whiskey River,* Bantam, $17.95. An author whose mastery of the hardboiled private-eye novel, the western, and the Sherlock Holmes pastiche is well known now turns to the Depression-era gangster saga with equally impressive results. The story of warring Detroit mobs is told by journalist Connie Minor, male as the pipe-smoking photo over his column makes clear. Most mystery writers are good storytellers—it's a prerequisite of the job—but few mold sentences and paragraphs as beautiful as Estleman's. See for example his contribution to the currently popular sport of lawyer-bashing on page 165. Larry Lurin's great jacket design suits the novel perfectly.

*** Carolyn G. Hart: *Deadly Valentine,* Doubleday/Crime Club, $14.95. In her sixth book-length case, South Carolina mystery book dealer Annie Laurance Darling confronts a closed circle whodunit among her neighbors in the gated Scarlet King compound. As usual, plenty of suspects, plenty of humor, plenty of feline observation, and *plenty* of mystery-fiction references. (Is anyone keeping statistics on the number of writers and fictional detectives Hart alludes to in her Death on Demand novels? Is this one a record or not?)

** John William Corrington and Joyce Corrington: *The White Zone,* Viking, $16.95. New Orleans wildman homicide cop Ralph "Rat" Trapp comes to southern California to see old lover Camille Bynum, who becomes the victim of bizarre murder during a star dedication on Hollywood Boulevard's Walk of Fame. The subsequent mystery, in-

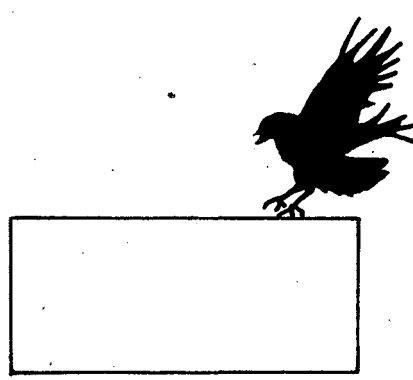
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

volving a series of deaths of Reagan associates and having its roots in the Hollywood witch hunts of the Forties and Fifties, makes for fast but unexceptional reading. (The use of dashes instead of quotation marks, a tradition of the series, serves no apparent purpose but to irritate the reader.)

** Margery Allingham: *The White Cottage Mystery* (Carroll & Graf, $3.50). I'm not sure this reprint of the author's 1928 mystery debut is actually a first American edition, but my reference sources show no earlier. The father-son sleuthing team of W. T. and Jerry Challoner seem intended for a series, but they didn't have a second case (at least at book-length), and given that their successor was Albert Campion few will regret the fact much. The tale is good, quick reading, far from the quality of work the author would produce later but an interesting view of a great mystery-writing talent in embryo. It also provides an early example (perhaps the first) of one of the rarest and toughest to pull off of least-suspected-person surprises. (Thus, the father-son team is not the only way in which Allingham anticipated EQ.)

If you're a mystery-loving parent who wants to be sure your offspring inherits your enthusiasm, there is a periodical especially for you—or, more accurately, for the offspring. *Holmes for the Holidays* is a digest-sized semipro periodical featuring puzzles, quizzes, comics, and stories for incipient mystery buffs. Bob Weber, Jr.'s Shylock Fox is featured in the front-cover illustrations and back-cover picture mysteries. Edited by Michael W. McClure, *Holmes* is published five times a year by The Chester Baskerville Society, 1415 Swanwick Street, Chester, IL 62233. Annual subscription price is $7.50.

© 1991 by Jon L. Breen.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Might Luz notice a new taste in her sugar? Could she have found the box of rags and tape in her closet? Would she know what they were for?

THE TWO SENORAS

by RICHARD PATRICK GIBBONS

Maria's scrub rag halted in mid-arc. The blonde girl straightened, aware suddenly that the roar of Mexico City's traffic was echoing up the stairwell. Peering over the bannister, the crippled nine-year-old saw a bright rectangle of morning sunlight on the first flight of stairs. She had left the street door open.

Tears stung Maria's eyes. For just a moment, she felt the shame of her foolishness and the fear of a beating when Senora Esperanza returned from Mass. But the despair was brief. This Wednesday promised fears and joy that threw her ordinary frights into shadow.

Maria's own papa had sent for her to come to live with him. After five years of silence, after all the times that Maria's mother said he didn't care about his straw-haired little girl with the club foot, Papa was sending for Maria. He had written Senora Esperanza that a friend was coming to Mexico City with a load of metal. Maria would ride back to Toluca on his truck that afternoon. All Maria's things were ready in a plastic bag beside her bed.

And Maria was bracing herself for a greater terror than Senora Esperanza's slap. She had favors to return. Before Papa's friend could take her away, Maria needed to pay her debt to Holy Mary and the Senora Esperanza by entering the room of the witch.

Maria had promised never again to enter the kitchen room where she had eaten Satan's bread with old Senora Luz. Now she needed to go in there one last time to end the woman's evil.

Impending happiness and terror had exacted a price. Maria had washed the lower and middle-floor hallways with half her mind in daydreams of reunion and the other half filled with visions of dread. She had dragged her bucket to the top landing only to find she'd forgotten to close the big door downstairs.

© 1991 by Richard Patrick Gibbons.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The *guera coja*—they called Maria the "blonde cripple"—gazed at the broken bannister on this second flight. She would have to hurry her scrubbing, descending the stairways on her knees as she worked. The alternative, lowering her foot, step by step, to the ground floor, was both frightening and time-consuming. Senora Esperanza would give her a beating if she left this last floor unscrubbed. And she would be back from Mass at any moment.

The outside door was always kept locked because the Senora was terribly afraid of thieves. People claimed no thief would bother Senora Esperanza or her roomers—the old house held nothing but nicked furniture and musty rugs. However that might be, the *guera coja* would pay if that door was ajar when the Senora returned. Maria hurried to finish the upstairs floor. She dipped her rag, wrung it between strong, pink little fingers, then knelt, swishing the length of cloth in front of her in a pretty arc.

Papa was a carpenter—he would certainly have fixed the broken bannister if he knew how it frightened his little girl. But he didn't know. Papa had gone when she was four. She had thought Senor Joel would be her new papa when he came to be in Mama's bed, but he didn't want to live in the room with another man's daughter, especially a cripple with green cat's eyes, so Maria came to live with fat, short-winded Senora Esperanza, her mother's aunt by marriage, who always needed a girl around the house.

That was many months ago. Now Mama had a new baby and she didn't come to see Maria on Sundays very often. Most Sundays were like any other day—up at seven o'clock to put on the beans and hobble out for bread. She had to have the dishes done, beds made, and halls mopped or Senora Esperanza would hit her when she returned from Mass.

The Senora went to Mass every day. She took Maria to confession each week and had her get all the sins of disobedience and laziness cleaned from her soul so that if she died she would go straight to Heaven.

The Senora was a saint. Her name—Esperanza—meant hope. And she had become Maria's only refuge now.

The sweet, dry smell of cinnamon enveloped Maria as she passed old Luz's door. As always, the witch was up to her tricks—making cinnamon tea to tempt Maria.

But today Maria knew the trick would be on Luz. On the previous afternoon, when the old witch was out shopping, Maria had taken a box of old clothes and some masking tape into her room. And in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Maria's apron there had been a piece of special brown sugar from the herb market. She had replaced all of old Luz's sugar with the special kind.

Could Luz know?

Might she notice a new taste in her sugar?

Could she have found the box of rags and tape in her closet?

Would she know what they were for? How could she?

Wouldn't a witch have ways of knowing such things?

Luz was a witch. Clever in her evil, the lean old woman still pretended friendship with Maria, and all the while she was plotting to take the house away. Police would come soon to put Senora Esperanza and her furniture out in the street and maybe even put Senor Silva—Esperanza's husband and Luz's own brother—in jail over the rent money she said was hers.

When Maria first came to the house, old Luz had seemed nice. Maria had sipped tea and munched sweet rolls with her when she should have been doing her work. Maria didn't want to do something wrong, but she was naturally an evil little girl and Luz had Satan on her side. She drank the witch's tea many times.

Senora Esperanza finally discovered what was happening and locked Maria in the black storeroom. Old Luz flew into a rage and called the police to take Maria to their orphan jail. Making trouble was part of her witch's plan to get the house.

The police didn't understand at all. If Senora Esperanza hadn't paid them money, they would certainly have taken Maria to the jail.

So now Maria avoided the witch's door. She left that section of the hallway for last and always crossed herself when she finally had to go near. But today the incantation failed. As her rag touched Luz's door, it eased open. Maria's glance raised to face the woman's gap-toothed smile. "Good *morning*, Maria."

"Good morning, Senora."

"Can I bring some tea out to you?"

"No, Senora." Maria drew back at the thought of sampling that tea. Its sugar would make her sleep all afternoon. "I don't want your tea," she told the witch. "Or your bread, either."

"Ai, child!" Luz breathed. "What lies has my sister-in-law been telling you now?"

Maria pulled herself to her feet in defiant wrath. "My Seno doesn't tell lies like you!"

The door closed, but not before Maria had seen tears shining in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the witch's eyes. Proud at having foiled the devil, she gave a saucy shrug, hefted her bucket, and stumped out onto the roof. Her stair-washing would require fresh water.

The top floor was only part of a floor. Its rear portion was a wide roof where the tenants did washing in two concrete basins and where they hung the clothes to dry. A visitor would enjoy the spectacle of Senora Luz's many potted roses and of the gardens of half a dozen similar rooftops. At that moment, the view was enlivened by Raul Cervantes, middle-aged, dressed in pajama bottoms and a beret. He was doing situps in front of the tarpaper shed that covered the washbasins. Senor Raul was a waiter. He said people ate themselves to death and regular exercise would help him avoid his customers' fate.

"Hola, cuatita," he greeted Maria between sits. "How are things?"

"Fine, thank you." Maria edged inside the tarpaper shelter and lifted her bucket onto the sink without turning her back. Senora Esperanza had warned her against trusting her male roomer.

"It's getting cold these mornings." The greying waiter stood and began his kneebends.

"Yes," Maria said absently. She was eyeing the cardboard part of Senora Luz's kitchen window, a kind of dumbwaiter door through which the old woman passed her dishes out to the sinks. Maria expected to crawl through the opening that afternoon.

"Winter will be here before long," Senor Raul observed.

"My daddy will buy me a coat."

"Oh, yes?"

When Maria first told Senor Raul about Papa's letter, the waiter had frowned and said not to expect miracles. He would believe it when she was gone.

She turned the faucet and water drummed into the bucket. A cat had been napping beyond the flowerpots. Startled, the animal leapt to the top of a cylinder of butane cooking gas, then took to the air, soaring to a ledge on the next building.

"Pechito," Maria called after it. *"Pechito, pechito, pechito!"*

The cat—a hank of frowzy calico—eyed Maria cautiously from its perch, ready to jump again if she threw something.

"You'll never coax that one down," Senor Raul assured her. "He's as wild as an eagle."

"He's my friend," Maria told him. "They all are. That one and the tailless yellow one and the one with the white—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Those are roof cats," Raul said. "They can never be really anyone's now. Some have never had a home."

"Maybe they will," she said. "Like me."

"Like you?" Senor Raul's voice seemed both sad and mocking. "Of course, *cuatita*."

Their talk ended there. Maria wrung the rag a final time, dropped it into her bucket, and went inside. Groping her way to the stairway, then to a kneeling position on the second step below the landing, she began washing the stairs.

The aroma of cinnamon tea faded as Maria scrubbed from step to step. Yet old Luz's fresh bid at temptation made her angry all over again. How could the old witch have such nerve? After trying to take the house away and even put Maria into the orphans' prison, she expected to act like a friend.

Anger sped her rag as she thrust it into the corners of each stair and her knees moved rapidly downward.

Of course Maria knew that God and His Holy Mother would not allow Luz to carry out her plan, even though Satan had sent a lawyer to Luz. Senora Esperanza was sure that God would save them and that Luz would die.

Maria knew she was part of God's plan. Senora Esperanza told her often how the children in the Bible had pushed the old witch into her own cooking pot. The Senora said that with the help of God even a little girl could defeat a sleeping witch.

But how she dreaded going into that room. She had been terrified of being in there when Luz wasn't even home. Now she needed to be there while the witch slept, and go about the things she needed to do with the tape and rags. What if, despite the special sugar, Luz woke? She imagined the witch's eyes staring—

"Don't run me over!" a laughing voice chided from behind.

Maria turned in fright, but she was already smiling at the friendliness in Senorita Carmen's voice. She brushed her hair back with one hand and grinned up at the young teacher whose door was at the bottom of the stair. Carmen was back early from her studies.

"Maria?" As Carmen spoke it, her name had a caressing sound.

"Yes, Senorita."

"Do you know how they get an elephant out of a well?"

Carmen's brown eyes grew wide with repressed laughter as she waited for a reply. Maria could think of none. "I don't know, Senorita," she said. "How?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Wet."

Maria clapped her hand over her mouth to keep from laughing out loud—a lack of courtesy that Senora Esperanza punished. Senorita Carmen laughed for both of them, a liquid warmth of sound bathing Maria in good feelings.

"Are you still going today?" Carmen asked.

"Oh, yes!" Maria wiggled with excitement. "Papa's friend came this morning with his truck. I saw him. He'll take me when he goes back."

"Would there be time for one last lesson?" Carmen asked. "We could review your letters." Carmen was teaching Maria to read. She had her own studies in the morning. Evenings, she taught the second shift of students at a grade school but her afternoons were free.

"Really?" Maria wanted to show Papa all she knew. "I'll come up before dinner. I just have to do some clothes is all."

"Do you wash the roomers' clothing now?" There was anger in Carmen's voice—she felt Senora Esperanza should have Maria in school.

"No, Senorita."

"I saw you with a box of clothes on the stairs yesterday." Carmen folded her arms. "It looked like laundry to me."

"You saw?" Maria was astonished. No one—not even Senor Silva—was supposed to know anything about the box of rags.

"You had a real struggle," Carmen said. "I thought you'd drop them if I startled you."

"The box wasn't heavy."

"Well, it looked heavy. And it certainly looked like washed clothes for the Senora up there."

"It was just old things."

"Old or new, you were delivering wash." Carmen sounded severe, then her voice softened again. "You don't have to cover up, Maria. I won't call the police. Not because—"

"Mar-ee-ah!"

Senora Esperanza's shrill voice came from below. Maria felt as if her dress was torn from her and she was standing naked in the hall. Carmen knew she shouldn't interfere. She raised her eyes to the ceiling, then blew a kiss to Maria and stepped back.

"Who left this door open?" the Senora demanded.

"Someone just went out."

"Nobody went out. You're lying, child. Come down here!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Maria hobbled along the second-floor bannister and lowered herself downstairs, fearful of a fall, more fearful of the woman below.

Senor Silva was speaking in her defense. She dared to glance down once to see the thin, shabby-dapper man pleading with his mountainous wife. His reedy voice, short-breathed with his own fear, trailed off as Maria approached the lower landing. Then he scurried into the living room, abandoning Maria to the storm.

"Maria?"

"Yes, Senora."

"Who left the door open?"

"I, Senora."

The slap hit Maria's shoulder instead of her face, but the weight of it spun the girl half around and threw her against the wall. Pain from the impact shot through her body while the Seno struck several more times, her hand landing heavily on Maria's ribs. She stood back then, panting with rage and the sudden effort. "Now close the door!"

Maria crept around the grey bulk of her mistress and shut the door. The hallway took on its accustomed yellow gloom and its accustomed odor—a compound of burnt grease, urine, and age. The Senora had heard voices as she entered. She asked, "Were you talking to Luz upstairs?"

"No, Senora. It was Senorita Carmen. She wants to give me my lesson today."

"Did you say you'd be busy?"

"I said I just have the washing."

The Senora frowned for a moment, then pushed on toward the kitchen. She never said there wouldn't be a spelling lesson and Maria imagined herself spending a final few minutes with her teacher.

Senorita Carmen left for work at midafternoon, so Maria still had most of the day to finish her work. She rushed through her other chores and hobbled out to the courtyard to begin washing clothes. Senora Esperanza settled onto her great wooden stool beside the washtubs to pray the rosary and pout commands.

The Senora was displeased with Maria's haste. "You're scrubbing too hard," she said, "you'll wear a hole in the collar." But softer scrubbing didn't please her, either. Maria had to give almost everything a second washing. The noon sunlight had passed and the courtyard was in shadow when Senorita Carmen opened her window.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Senora Esperanza," she called down. "How are you?"

"Fine, Senorita. I see you're as pretty as always."

"Thank you, Senora. Would it be all right for Maria to come for her final class pretty soon?"

"You're so kind, Senorita. But Maria doesn't know how to take advantage of her opportunities. I'm afraid she's spending the whole day on a few clothes."

The window shut.

An hour later, when the Senora had Maria cutting vegetables in the kitchen, Senorita Carmen came to the hall door to say goodbye. She and Maria had only a minute for their farewells before Senora Esperanza called the girl back to her duties.

The dinner was very special, with *mole poblano* and sour cream. Maria got a big piece of meat on her plate and ate at the same table as the big people, just like Independence Day.

Senora Esperanza spoke to Maria all through the meal. She apologized for being so cross about the clothes. She said she was happy that Maria had a place to go. She wondered still if Luz wouldn't take her house away and put Senor Silva in jail. She thanked God that Maria had come to be with them and remove the witch.

Dinner was their last time together. Senora Esperanza had begun doing the Stations of the Cross on Wednesdays. She always took Senor Silva with her. After church, they would visit relatives in San Cosme and not return home until quite late.

Senor Silva gave Maria his big kerchief because Toluca was a windy and dusty place. He told her to be careful of all men. He said to find someone to write them a letter so they would know she had arrived safely. He counted out a wad of worn paper money and put it into Maria's bag. He hugged her and tried to smile at her happiness.

The Senora was more gruff. When Senor Silva had gone down the steps, she reviewed the way that Maria was to deal with the witch and stressed using time well before the man came with the truck. She took a thick envelope from her purse and sealed it shut with an edge of pink tongue before she slipped it into Maria's bag. Then she patted Maria's head and waddled down the steps as Maria closed the big door.

Maria was alone with the sleeping witch.

She had only a little more than two hours before her daddy's friend

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

came with the truck to take her away. Wrapping a small hand around the bannister, she pulled herself up the stairway to the empty second floor. She passed the doors of Senor Raul and Senorita Carmen, who had both gone to work. Because its bannister had broken, she climbed the second flight of stairs on hands and knees, then she scrambled to Senora Luz's door before she got to her feet.

Maria inserted the key and pushed the door open on Luz's familiar narrow kitchen, where she had once spent time having cinnamon tea.

The witch was sprawled in her chair at the table, head back and snoring. She must have been sleeping all afternoon because of the special sugar, just as Senora Esperanza had said.

Maria steeled herself. Setting foot in the witch's room took all of her courage, all of her love of God, and all of her loyalty to the Senora Esperanza.

Much of the fear vanished as she settled to work clearing Senora Luz's dishes from the table. She took the dishes and the special sugar and pushed them through a patched door in the room's rear window that gave onto the washtubs on the roof. Next she retrieved her box of rags and tape from its hiding place in Luz's closet. Down in the storeroom, the Senora had shown her exactly how to close off the openings. She stuffed rags into the opening under the door and taped it shut. She did the same to Luz's larger window and packed and taped the interior door that led to the bedroom. All that time, the witch's snores rang like hammer blows through the room.

At last, the preparations were done. Maria went to the kitchen stove, blew out all of the pilot lights, and opened the oven. She turned its valve and the stove began to make a hissing noise.

She retreated through the little carboard doorway in Luz's window, pulling herself onto the outdoor sinks in the tarpaper house where she had filled her bucket. She left the rooftop on her hands and knees, seen only by the calico cat she had frightened that morning.

Maria let herself down the quiet stairs in a great hurry, nearly tumbling in her fever to put distance between the dying witch and herself. She only relaxed when she had reached the downstairs kitchen.

There were always many dishes. Maria was scarcely getting into the pots and pans when her papa's friend knocked hard on the outside door. She went to open it, still in her apron.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I have to finish my work," she told him.

"No. We've got to go."

She wondered how the man could be her papa's friend. He was very dirty, with tiny eyes that wouldn't look at her as he groped into her plastic bag.

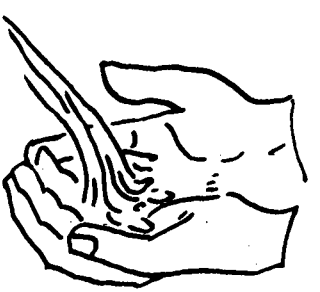
He found Senor Silva's wad of money and cursed. She shied back, expecting him to hit her for stealing. Then he quieted, hefting Senora Esperanza's envelope in his hand. He tore it open and ran an oil-blacked thumb across its bared contents, a packet of fine new bills that had many zeros at their corners. She saw him relax.

"The Senora Esperanza said to finish the dishes," she told him.

"That's not a problem," he said. "Where you're going, there won't be dishes." His hand closed on her arm. "Come on."

He hurried her so fast that she forgot to drop the Senora's dish towel. To take it was stealing, but much as she pleaded with the dirty man he wouldn't turn back.

She wondered if there were priests in Toluca. She might die someday with the sin still on her soul.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

By the time Teddy was thirty, he was more than the mild family joke: he was regarded as eccentric and treated accordingly.

Martin Werner has written copy for three major New York advertising agencies. He has done political writing and written for the film-and-television department of the Metropolitan Museum. "A Little Game" is his first fiction . . .

A LITTLE GAME

by MARTIN WERNER

I'd been waiting for years.

How many? Forty? Fifty? When did I start waiting for dear, sweet Aunt Evelyn to die? Make that "dear, sweet Aunt Evelyn" to *other* people. Not me. I had a different opinion.

To me, she'd always been raucous but cold, overly generous to other people and tight-fisted with her family. I hated her. That would certainly surprise the good folks in our town who praised Evelyn Squire all her life for her kindness, good works, and endless charities. I never told a living soul how I really felt about my aunt. At home, at school, and at the bank I was taught to keep my shirt buttoned down and my feelings buttoned up. A good lesson. Still, I wonder how I managed to keep my murderous rage hidden all those years.

Even when I was a little boy, Aunt Evelyn was an embarrassment to me. Her laugh was too loud, her clothes were too flashy. And her jokes—always at my expense—could be cruel and heartless. "Pay attention, Teddy," she'd say. "That's a joke I just told. Don't you *get* it?" Or, to my mother, "Marian, where did you find this boy? There's no one like him on our side of the family." Her tone of voice made it clear she meant no compliment.

"Wake up, Teddy."

© 1991 by Martin Werner.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Get with it, child."

"Look at yourself, Teddy. Is there such a thing as a *male* wallflower?"

It's possible she didn't mean to be cruel. In her own insensitive way, maybe she even liked me a little and was trying to help me become—well, who knows what.

Let me tell you something else about Aunt Evelyn. She was born lucky. Her husband owned a small chain of jewelry stores throughout the Midwest. Uncle Al and Aunt Evelyn had been married for only six years when one day he caught a chill and died. Things like pneumonia happened fast in our town back in those days—just about the only thing that did.

So there was poor Aunt Evelyn (only she was rich Aunt Evelyn now), alone except for us, her only family: my mother, my father, my sister, and I. We were all she had. An average, middle-class 1935 Ohio family. I hardly remember the Great Depression. Unless you were really poor, a boy my age lived through it without a scratch. Same with the war. I barely got through my basic training and it was all over.

When the war ended in 1945, it seemed like there was a whole new world just beginning for people like me. All kinds of opportunities were opening up. College on the GI Bill. Business was booming. New careers were opening up.

Except nothing happened to me. Absolutely *nothing*. As my family put it back then, I didn't "latch onto" things. (Probably because I simply wasn't interested in what other people thought was interesting.)

Maybe my indifference to dates and sports and a career went back to a harmless little remark my father repeated to me over and over again when I was growing up: "I know Aunt Evelyn gives you a hard time, Teddy, but be nice to her. You know she doesn't have anyone but you and your big sister." Or a comment I overheard him make to my mother: "Thank heaven Teddy has Evelyn, Marian. I'm afraid the boy will never set the world on fire. But with her money he should make it through all right."

Yes, my father knew I wasn't one of those hearty, glad-handing fellows like the one who married my sister. I just sort of got through my nine-to-five day, held down my not-very-demanding assistant manager's job at the bank—and dreamed, more and more as time went on, about all that money I was going to inherit from a woman who didn't have anyone else to leave it to. I was an *heir*. Why spend

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

your life knocking yourself out like other people when all you had to do was wait for the pot of gold just down the road. Of course my sister would share whatever my aunt left in her will, but I didn't mind. I knew there'd be plenty for both of us.

My lack of any real ambition didn't seem to upset my family as much as it bewildered them. And by the time I was thirty, I was more than the mild family joke: I was regarded as eccentric, and treated accordingly.

"Did you remember to send Aunt Ev a birthday card, Teddy? You're her favorite, you know."

"Teddy, how long has it been since you went to visit your aunt? You know how much she misses you when you don't drop by."

I didn't mind. Those sly little digs from my family to be nice to Aunt Evelyn worked their spell. Because I knew that one day I'd do something that would really please her and I'd get the reward I dreamed about.

As the years passed, nothing much seemed to come from my "niceness" efforts. I mowed my aunt's lawn and tended her famous rose bushes. I shoveled her walk in the winter and ran the occasional errand. And I thought she actually began to like me. A little.

But it was my sister she took to Europe one summer. And when my sister married, my aunt bestowed on her the "priceless" family silver. Those times she made some kind of vague promise like, "Don't worry, Teddy, I'll do something for you, too, someday." Someday.

I tried to be cheerful. A trip to Europe? I didn't care. Who'd want to spend a month dragging a fat, overdressed aunt through a lot of museums and churches you didn't have the slightest interest in? Wedding gifts? She could keep her priceless silver, I'd wait for the big prize. Aunt Evelyn's money. She'd promised, and in our family a promise was a promise.

In 1974 my father died of a heart attack on his way to work. Ten years later my mother passed away after a long illness. And last year my sister and her husband were killed on a tourist bus in Mexico.

And suddenly, here we were at last, Aunt Evelyn and me—the last of the McWilliam family. The rich old aunt and the nephew she was stuck with, the one she'd made fun of all those years. But now the nephew was well into middle age and ailing, the only thing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

keeping him alive, he sometimes thought, the inheritance that was going to be all his at last.

Don't give up now, I kept telling myself. You've waited this long. What's a few months more or less? Or a few years? Aunt Evelyn was in her late eighties but as healthy, lively—and loud—as she had been as long as I'd known her. But she didn't tease or make jokes about me any more. She was too old—or resigned?—for that now. Our relationship had settled down. Cool, polite, friendly.

No, she didn't die. But the time came when even she realized it was foolish to live alone in that big old house of hers any longer. It was one of the happiest days of my life when she announced she was going to move to a fancy nursing home a few miles away.

Her news came at a chapter ending in my life, too. I was sixty-three now, and the bank was in the midst of still another of its reorganization programs. I was offered early retirement and given a farewell dinner (six people showed up) and a silver tray. That was it. A few listless handshakes and it was all over.

With my tiny income, I managed to get through the next few months. I'd never learned to make friends with many people and all I had now was an elderly aunt I visited every week, the afternoon soap operas on TV, and a series of mildly disturbing little illnesses. And the tired dream of my inheritance, of course.

Wouldn't *you* be just a little unhappy by the hand that fate had dealt you? Try to put yourself in my shoes.

That's why I played a little game with myself every evening before I went to bed. It was called "Killing Aunt Evelyn." Here's how it went: I simply wrote down on a piece of paper all the ways I could think of to get rid of the old lady who'd stood in my way for as long as I could remember. Maybe they weren't very original—it was only a game, after all—but I was sure I could get away with any one of them if I chose to try.

Here are just a few I typed on my list: (1) Give Aunt Evelyn a pretty new hair dryer for Christmas. Except when she turns it on, it bursts into flames. (2) Rush into her room carrying a newspaper with one of those fake headlines you can have printed in a novelty store: WORST WALL STREET CRASH IN HISTORY—SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM COLLAPSES. Her brother died of a heart attack, after all. (3) Make a couple of tiny adjustments on the motorized wheelchair she zooms around in so that when she presses Slow or Stop she's catapulted—wherever.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

My list went on for pages. Poison. More frights. Sudden falls. You get the idea. It was just a way to get myself through an evening.

This morning I got up early to catch the eight o'clock bus to the nursing home to visit Aunt Evelyn. I wasn't feeling very well, so it took me longer than usual to dress and get myself together for the dreary day that lay ahead.

I was out the front door and on the sidewalk before I remembered the things I'd promised to bring my aunt this visit. A new novel from the library. Some makeup (vain old bitch). And a box of that disgusting cheap candy she's been eating for years. So it was back up the steps, into the house, and stuffing them into a shopping bag before I was really on my way.

My visit with Aunt Evelyn was the same as always. We talked about the weather. Her health. Her investments. Then it was time for her lunch and her nap, after which we continued our desultory small talk. Luckily, she'd found an old book of family photographs she'd brought with her to the home and those at least got us through the rest of the afternoon.

At about six, as always, after a cold little kiss on the cheek and the promise to return next week, I left to catch the last bus. Another boring day in the boring life of Teddy McWilliam.

I told you, didn't I, that I felt slightly ill when I woke up this morning? Well, as the long day at the nursing home wore on, I didn't feel any better, so it was a real relief to get back home, open a can of soup for dinner, then climb into bed and work on my "Killing Aunt Evelyn" list before turning out the lights.

And that's when I panicked. Where *was* the list? Where had I put it last night before I'd gone to bed?

I looked through all the drawers in my desk. Not there. The kitchen cupboard. Not there, either. I searched everywhere I could think of in the house. It was nowhere. Nowhere!

I raced from room to room, pulled apart closets, tore open cabinets, searched behind shelves, even pulled up the rugs. I was frantic! What if someone found it? I thought my heart would explode in a million pieces.

Then the phone rang and my heart stopped. I knew instantly what I was going to hear when I picked up the receiver.

"Teddy? Teddy? Is that you? This is Aunt Evelyn." Her voice was harsh and cruel, just as when I was a little boy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You think you're funny, do you, with that terrible list of ways to kill me? I found it folded up in the library book you brought me just as you meant me to. Since when did you develop a sense of humor?"

"Just a minute, Aunt Evelyn. I can explain this whole silly—"

"No, Teddy, spare me. I don't need any of your explanations. Just a promise."

"Anything, Aunt Evelyn."

"Promise you'll never come here again. Don't call. Don't write. Just stay away!"

"But Aunt Evelyn, it was only a joke."

"A joke? You never could understand a joke. Now I'm going to hang up, and if you're smart you'll never try to reach me again. If you do, I think the police would be interested in seeing this little joke of yours."

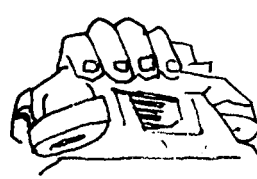
"Wait, Aunt Evelyn!" I was desperate. "We're the only two left in the family—all we've got is each other! What about all the promises you made to me? What about the money? My money!"

She began to laugh—nastily, the way I remember her laughing years ago when someone told her a mildly dirty story. When she stopped, her voice was the voice of an old, old woman—slow, measured, interrupted by dry coughs and heavy breathing. "You poor fool," she said. "Don't you know I never liked you? You were a joke, a family joke. If you weren't my brother's son— Oh, never mind. Even you must know it's easy to change a will. My lawyer will be out here first thing in the morning."

"Wait, Aunt—"

"Goodbye, Teddy." And she slammed down the receiver.

So the waiting game is over. And do you know what? I always knew in my heart I'd never see a penny of my aunt's money.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Crossing the small bridge that was this neighborhood's only link with the rest of the city, Julian thought again of the common nickname the police had for this section of the shore resort—Jungle Land. He couldn't remember who had started it, but he knew the phrase had been borrowed from a Bruce Springsteen hit of a few summers ago. It fit. The neighborhood was six blocks wide and featured row upon row of up-and-down duplexes, small beach-type bungalows, and huge old homes divided into apartments resembling rat mazes. It was surrounded by water as it thrust into the back bay and there were two alleys that were frequently the scenes of foot pursuits by the police. It was one big party from sundown to sunup.

Patrolman Julian Hall was introduced to you in David Dean's first published story, "The See-Through Man," in the October 1990 issue. We've said it before: the first stories we publish are a thrill for us, the seconds are a joy. Not that there is anything joyful about the mood or theme of this story. In fact, parental guidance is recommended . . .

JUNGLE LAND

by DAVID DEAN

The black-and-white cruised virtually unopposed by traffic, pedestrian or otherwise, northbound on Ocean Drive, bisecting the northern end of the island as it did so. Its sole occupant was Patrolman Julian Hall and he surveyed his assigned sector with a bemused eye as he began his shift. The heat of the day was barely an hour past its peak and the inhabitants, both local and tourist, were driven indoors to combat their thirst with great quantities of chilled alcohol, or to lay, as if slain, in lawn chairs and on decks throughout the city. Most were sporting tans that Julian could only

© 1991 by David Dean.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

marvel at—his schedule would never permit him the amount of leisure required to absorb that much sun. The idea of skin cancer flitted across his mind and a corresponding smile ran briefly across his lips.

During the summer months it wasn't unusual for him to log sixty hours a week between patrol, court, and special duty. Of course, there was all that overtime pay, which virtually lifted his family to the status of lower middle-class, but he suffered accordingly. The sense of isolation he acquired from working changing shifts was intensified by the additional hours. His little family was on a permanent day shift and his schedule matched theirs only once a month, minus the overtime.

The shore resort of Camelot was at its summer apogee, packed with day-trippers and weekly renters, harboring thousands of gallons of booze and beer and offering practically no parking spaces. It had the look of a successful invasion by barbarians who didn't care to keep what they had taken.

It was four-thirty now and Julian turned right on Eleventh Street, heading toward the beach—passing as he did so a large, ramshackle house that had been divided up into three apartments. The whole affair was painted a drab, unfestive brown and Julian noted yet another broken window. At the end of each summer the place was closed due to building-code violations and the following summer reopened and packed to the rafters with teenagers. Julian had responded to a number of underage drinking parties and crowd fights at the address. He made a mental note to check on the young man lying amidst a welter of crushed beer cans and wrecked lawn chairs on a return trip. The kid was breathing, but he'd be fried if he wasn't dragged into the shade soon. Julian wondered briefly if the greenhead flies were biting today. The kid would have the answer to that when he woke up.

For the moment, Julian chose to remain in the air-conditioned patrol car and continue his initial inspection of the north end. Between the oppressive temperature and his protective vest, leather gear, and uniform, he wasn't well suited for the heat and promised himself that any encounter that resulted in profuse sweating would end in an arrest.

The beach and boardwalk were something of a relief. The day's cooling always began here, with a slight freshening of the wind and a subtle chill that was felt most by those who had been in the sun

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the longest. Julian climbed the steps to the boardwalk and walked over to the seaward railing. He noticed out of the corner of his eye some pre-teen boys and girls attempting to hide cigarettes they had just purchased from the vending machine in the Amusement Arcade. The result was so attention-getting, Julian favored them with his full attention. He faced them squarely and almost smiled when they immediately broke into groups of twos and threes and drifted quickly in different directions. He turned again to the beach.

The light reflecting off the white sand made it difficult to see the beach well. That and the moisture hanging in the air gave the scene a peculiar glow, reminding him of a 1950s film about nuclear war. The bodies on the beach were all lying with their feet to the sea, as if simultaneously pole-axed by the offshore blast.

There were survivors, however. A number were making their way to the boardwalk, as the afternoon drew on toward evening. They moved in a dazed shuffle, with seared, vacant faces, seeming to choose the exit steps that Julian stood at, as if transfixed and drawn by his uniform. For a moment he felt a slight tightening of his scalp as he began to believe in his own fantasy, then he took off his sunglasses and exposed his eyes to the merciless glare, both to re-orient himself and as punishment for allowing his mind to wander.

Returning to the car, he guided it toward Headquarters, careful to avoid the people walking in the street. That was another curious phenomenon about vacationers: their phobia of sidewalks. Julian had long ago given up trying to shoo them out of traffic. Dinnertime, he thought as he pulled into a parking space.

The squadroom was vacant for a change, it being too early for the summer-hire officers, all youth, energy, and noise, and not late enough for most of the regulars. This was the ideal time as far as Julian was concerned, nothing but the hum of the soda machine and blessed solitude before the after-dinner calls began to come in.

He opened his paper lunch-bag and sat down at the formica table. The intercom phone rang. There was no one else, so he answered. The dispatcher's voice was crisp. "Julian? There's someone up front to see you."

Julian, baffled, asked, "Me? They asked to see me? What's it about?"

"She didn't wish to say—and, no, she didn't ask for you in particular, but you *are* the only officer here, you know."

So that was the reason for the frosty tone. A female in distress

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

who dared not confide in the dispatcher. Only regulations had saved the girl from being denied service and unceremoniously ejected from the premises.

"I'll be right up," he said, and reluctantly folded his bag shut and placed it in the mini-fridge.

The interview room was small and held only a table and three chairs—intentionally cramped to discourage physical outbursts and enhance the sense of a confessional.

She was waiting in one of the chairs with her knees drawn primly together and a large, floppy beachbag clutched to her bosom. Julian briefly wondered if the bag was positioned to hide the natural reaction that sets in when sun-warmed flesh meets air-conditioned air. She was no more than twenty and brown as a nut. She wore the usual vacation ensemble of sandals, large-legged shorts, and a pastel tank-top of some thin cottonlike material. Maybe braless, thought Julian, hence the bag. Her face was attractive without being pretty—finely boned, with full lips and green eyes that snapped with intelligence. Her wavy brown hair was cut just above the shoulders and pulled back with several artlessly placed barrettes.

Julian didn't bother smiling and began with his usual introduction. "I'm Patrolman Julian Hall. May I help you?"

She watched carefully until he was seated opposite and then spoke with only the slightest tremor. "Yes. I want to report that my roommate has probably been raped."

Julian was careful not to betray any reaction. "And your name?"

Her reply was edged with impatience at his insistence on protocol. "Donna Pacifico."

"Ms. Pacifico, I couldn't help but notice that you used the word 'probably.' Would you tell me why?"

Now that she had begun, her control was beginning to slip. Julian noted the pulse in her throat and the beginning of a mistiness in her large eyes. The pause in her answer was growing longer.

"Ms. Pacifico?"

She started at her name and set off at a gallop. "Jennifer O'Hurley's my roommate, here and back at college in Pennsylvania. We're both juniors now. She's an English Lit major, though she's thinking of changing that during the fall semester and I'm declaring for Sociology."

Julian waited.

"We're sharing this place out on Twenty-second Street with a few other girls and working part-time at that breakfast place at the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

anchorage. Just for spending money, you know. Well, last night Jenny ran into an old girl friend from her high school and got invited along to a big keg party on Twenty-first. You guys probably know where it is—I think you broke it up sometime this morning."

Julian made a mental note to check the entries from the midnight shift and quietly interrupted. "What makes you think we were out there?"

"Jenny told me. That's what woke her up—all the screaming and yelling and everyone running out the back when the cops came. She came dragging in about five o'clock this morning. I know, because I heard her crying. She's been crying off and on ever since."

Donna's own eyes were moist and her voice was unsteady. "She must have taken six or seven showers today already. That's what tipped me off. That and the fact that the clothes she was wearing were in the garbage this afternoon. There was blood on them and it's not her time. She just bought those things this summer! Now don't try and tell me that something didn't happen last night at that party!"

Julian replied carefully, rueing the fact that any tangible evidence had been tossed into the trash and hopelessly contaminated. "Ms. Pacifico, I assume you've spoken with your friend about her behavior. What did she have to say, and why didn't she make this report herself?"

As soon as the words left his mouth, he cringed. He'd had to ask, though he knew how he must appear to her. He was not disappointed. She locked eyes with him for the first time, all signs of her tearfulness gone.

"Why the hell do you *think?* Would *you* want to march in here to a total stranger and give him the details of your being raped? She was so humiliated she couldn't even talk to *me!* I asked her outright and all she could do was nod her head yes. She got hysterical when I mentioned the police. She's terrified her parents will find out. There's something else, too. She's got a steady boy friend back home. Do you understand what this could do? Do you?"

Julian nodded his head slowly, taking his time before asking his next question, letting the tension dissipate.

"Did she give you any indication of what happened and who was involved?"

Donna took a deep breath and seemed to wilt now that her anger and fear were out. "She did say she thought it was two guys but she was so drunk she couldn't be sure. She didn't know anyone there.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

—She remembers a washing machine. She thinks they took her into a laundry room. I think the address was sixty something.

"Please get these guys, Mr. Hall! Even though Jenny's afraid to come in, something should be done. There are a lot of girls here on vacation. If they did this to Jenny, they'll do it to others. None of us come expecting this kind of thing at the shore!"

Neither did the other girl, thought Julian, thinking of a phone call a week ago by an outraged parent. In that case, the girl had simply dragged herself from the party to her car and driven all the way back to Bryn Mawr. She never came back for her belongings and told her parents a week later. They were hysterical with anger and fear when they called. Grief over the girl's shattered spirit would come later.

So what they had were at least two rapes, no suspects, no evidence, and no one but this girl willing to file a complaint.

He slowly fished a card out of his wallet and handed it to her. "Donna, make sure Jennifer gets this. There's a lady answers this number who's been there and back. Please have her call."

He knew how feeble it all sounded. "We'll be looking for these guys, Ms. Pacifico. We'll do our best to get them. To be honest, though, our chances aren't good."

She stood and patted his hand. Julian suddenly felt that he was the one being reassured. "I know you'll try," she said. "I know you will."

Julian stood and offered his hand. "Do you happen to have a photograph of Ms. O'Hurley?"

Donna dug into her bag for her wallet. A moment later she handed Julian a snapshot of a girl smiling into the camera. The shot had been taken on the beach, with the resultant washout of the subject's face. But she would be recognizable. Blonde hair, probably bleached, and a little too frizzy. A cute, pugnacious face. A little tired around the eyes and altogether looking as if she'd had a bad night. Julian thought she was very different from her roommate. She had the look of having been around. But what difference did that make? She certainly didn't deserve what had happened.

After leaving a brief report of the incident in the detectives' basket, Julian departed the building, dinner untouched, and headed for Twenty-first Street. A scan of last night's entries had shown the Noise Squad—otherwise known as the "party poopers"—had re-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sponded to only one address in the six-hundred block. That was where he headed now.

But first, a brief detour to check on young Bacchus.

It was just starting to turn to dusk when Julian cruised slowly past the rabbit warren on Eleventh Street. The boy, like Lazarus, had risen and undoubtedly was girding his loins even now for another night of revelry. His outline was still visible in the tall rank grass. Julian turned around for Twenty-first.

Crossing the small bridge that was this neighborhood's only link with the rest of the city, Julian thought again of the common nickname the police had for this section—Jungle Land. He couldn't remember who had started it, but he knew the phrase had been borrowed from a Bruce Springsteen hit of a few summers ago. It fit. The neighborhood was six blocks wide and featured row upon row of up-and-down duplexes, small beach-type bungalows, and huge old homes divided into apartments resembling rat mazes. It was surrounded by water as it thrust into the back bay and there were two alleys that were frequently the scenes of foot pursuits by the police. It was one big party from sundown to sunup.

The neighborhood was already beginning to heat up as darkness fell. Several second-floor decks were so jammed with college-age kids swigging beer it was a wonder they didn't collapse. At least once a summer, in fact, one did. Amazingly, no one had yet been killed. Only paralyzed.

Julian drove through several walls of sound as he proceeded west. These zones had been created by stereos, dragged outside or onto porches, with speakers so large that the bass they produced seemed to literally pulsate the atmosphere in front of them. He was greeted by the usual catcalls from onlookers when he signed out at the six-hundred address.

The kid that answered the door had obviously been awakened from his siesta. Julian could see that he was trying to make up his mind whether to get nasty with the cop or not. He looked like he'd had about enough of these local thugs interfering with his summer.

"Yes, may I help you?"

Julian didn't think he was very sincere. "You may. Are you on the lease here?"

"What's the problem, officer?"

Julian ignored that. "I need to speak with someone on the lease here."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The boy brushed his mop of mushroom-styled hair back from his face with an impatient gesture. "I'm on the lease along with several other guys. Is it about the party last night? I didn't care for the way my guests and I were treated, I can tell you that. Why are you here?"

This kid's name is Biff, thought Julian. Or maybe Chad. There's some secret factory that clones thousands of these upper-class kids, instills them with a permanent look of disdain, and sends them out in search of immediate gratification.

"I'm here because I'd like you to show me in."

Biff's face began to get a look of barely suppressed triumph. "Do you have a warrant?"

"I don't have a warrant, Biff, but I do have a problem. A problem that I think you can help me with. A young lady says she was raped here last night. That's an indictable crime, Biff. I know that you wouldn't want to obstruct or impede our investigation—that would cast more suspicion on this household than already exists. I believe a quick tour of the house would be beneficial for everyone, don't you? I expect you've leased this place for the entire summer. It's only late June. It's going to be a fine, long summer."

Julian said all of this with an easy smile. The boy was rocked.

"My name's not Biff," he said and held open the screen door.

The tour and subsequent interviews with the young men of the house revealed nothing. No one professed to remember the girl. The small cottage was the usual beer-can-strewn shambles consisting of motel-like furniture and numerous daybeds. The only item of interest was an old-style washroom off the back porch. It contained a hot-water heater, an old scrub-sink, and a dilapidated washing machine. There was a single-size daybed taking up almost all of the remaining floor space. This is where it happened, thought Julian as he stared down at the stained mattress. Using his pen-light, he peered underneath it into the furred darkness of ancient dust.

The beam of light glinted off a small sharp-edged object. Julian thought at first it was a disposable-razor cartridge holder and almost ignored it, but conscientiousness made him bring it out.

It was a six-bulb flash bar, commonly used on Polaroid cameras. Each bulb had been used and its plastic covering was only lightly filmed with dust. There were partial prints on each of its long sides. Placing the pen-light on the floor and aiming it underneath the bed, Julian got down on a level with it and was able to discern a faint path through the dust to the resting place of the flash bar. Probably

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dropped and accidentally kicked under the bed. It didn't match the single camera in the house.

Julian carefully took it away with him.

The party had been in full swing for several hours and the house was packed. It was being billed as a Christmas in July party and had drawn over seventy people, a smattering of them sporting Santa beards and red hats. The sliding glass doors were open to facilitate the ebb and flow of the crowd from indoors to out and iced kegs were available in both the kitchen and on the front deck.

This was one of those nights when the offshore breeze failed to reach the back-bay area. The air was thick and seemed to be a repository for every foul smell imaginable. Low tide was adding the odor of dead fish to the existing effluvium of beer, sweat, and vomit.

Christopher tested the atmosphere tentatively with a slight sniff of his stubby nose. My God, he thought, how do people put up with this smell? There's only one smell worse that I can think of—and his thoughts drifted back to previous parties and previous girls—girls with their rear ends propped up by pillows while he hammered away at them, girls who had allowed themselves to get so drunk that he'd had no trouble carting them off and, with the help of Jeff, making a record of their condition and his triumph.

His gaze shifted across the room of sweaty, overly loud kids in search of Jeff. Jeff, his little partner. Jeff the queer. Chris had found that out on more than one occasion. The next day, of course, he had given little Jeff a beating. Little Jeff, who always seemed to be around when Chris was feeling a little down and had had a little too much to drink.

Jeff, looking damp and nervous, was smiling across the room at him, waiting for his attention. He had a bimbo lined up in the corner and she was just about ready to go. All the symptoms were there—the flushed, perspiring face, the eyes just beginning to cross, intelligent speech gone, and the whole body loose and relaxed.

It had been Jeff's idea to take the pictures, a natural outgrowth of the continuing series he took of Chris in various poses and settings—each shot framed to show off Chris's magnificent physique, each photo a paean to his masculinity.

Chris laughed aloud as Jeff took a flash shot of the girl's face. She was so far gone it startled her and she nearly fell over backward. Jeff turned and smiled at Chris's expression. Chris always liked a "before" shot for a trophy . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Julian was nearing the end of his fourth midnight shift when the call came in. A noise complaint off Twentieth Street's five-hundred block. It had been an exceptionally busy night—rescue calls, fires, fights, DWIs, and even a domestic dispute for flavor. He was bottomed out now, with that kind of weariness that always came at dawn. He felt hollow and without passion. He felt no kinship or interest in his fellow man.

His partner and he heard the screams long before they spotted the address. They were wails, actually—long, drawn-out affairs ending in a self-hating cry of anguish. The usually laughing gulls gathered on the sunrise-tinted roofs and, tearing through the overturned garbage, did not bother competing. Julian thought for a moment that their silence was almost respectful to this voice from the depths of hell. The voice told him that there was no hurry—the damage was done.

He parked and approached the house, his partner trailing behind and to his right as cover. Several neighbors were standing in the wet grass, uneasily eyeing the residence. Seeing the uniforms, the oldest and crankiest-looking of the group detached himself and made a beeline for them. "Officers! Officer, could I say something? We've put up with about enough, I think! These goddamned kids partied all night. They finally quit about four A.M. and now this! My God, are you going to do anything about this?"

As he was clearly heading for the door, Julian saw no need to answer. A very harried and hungover-looking young man with a bandana tied on his head was waiting at the door. Julian noted that his hands were empty and that he was wearing cutoff bluejeans. He swept past him toward the rear of the house where the screams were coming from. Unbelievably, there were at least six young people who hadn't been awakened by the turmoil and were lying in various, uncomfortable-looking positions throughout the house. The air reeked of alcohol. Julian noted something else scattered about the wrecked rooms: flash bars, a dozen or more identical to the one he still carried in his shirt pocket.

The victim was in a room that must have been a pantry at one time. She had a tie-dyed sheet draped over her shoulders which another young woman was desperately trying to cover her with. The victim was without caring. She was thrashing from side to side on a folding cot and had recently vomited. Her buttocks were bruised and bloody.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She was just beginning her lost wail again when Julian stepped into her line of vision.

"Stop," he said. "We're going to take you out of here and get you some help."

Her scream was caught midthroat and her eyes widened in horror. She pulled the sheet that was so ineffectually covering her nakedness over her head. She no longer cared about her pain, only her shame.

Julian spoke over his portable to Headquarters. "One-Fourteen to Seven."

"Go ahead, One-Fourteen."

"Get an EMT headed this way and wake up a detective. I'm also gonna need a couple of guys for maintaining the scene here."

"Ten-Four, One-Fourteen—I'll be toning out Rescue."

Julian's partner took a position next to the doorway of the room the girl was in while Julian approached the boy with the bandana on his head.

"This was your party?"

The boy wasn't feeling too sure of himself and his pounding headache wasn't helping. "Well, me and a few other guys. It wasn't my idea alone. What's wrong with the girl?"

Julian stared hard at him.

"Officer, if she's OD-ing I had nothing to do with it! We don't have drugs here!" He was finding some moral indignation now. "I don't allow drugs in my place! I don't even think she was invited!"

Julian picked up a photo lying on an end table. It was a self-developing type that tended to brighter hues and whiter faces. This one was of the host. He was framed between two hysterical-looking young women, the three of them toasting the photographer with sloshing beer mugs.

Julian held the photo up for the host's inspection. "Who took this?"

The boy took a few steps back in order to focus. Julian noticed now that there were dozens of "party shots" lying about. Several of the un-dead had them placed on their chests. The unconscious faces in the photos matched those of the unconscious kids they were placed on. The photographer had a sense of humor.

"I'm asking you again," he said. "Who's the court photographer?"

"Honest to God, officer, I don't know! Just a couple of guys that showed up. I think they might have known a few people here. Any-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

way, they offered to give everybody free photos of their partying. I said fair enough, grab some beers and don't forget the host, dudes."

Julian watched him run out of steam. "I want to know what these dudes look like, who they are, and where I can find them."

The host smacked the bottom of a bare foot belonging to one of the sleepers. The sleeper groaned and came up on his elbows, his party shot sliding off his chest. "Chet, yo Chet! This police officer needs to know where those dudes are that were taking pictures last night. Didn't you know the big guy? Chet? You with us?"

Chet felt that he might be sick very soon and decided quickly against playing hardass. Besides, he barely knew the guys they were talking about—different frat altogether.

"Um, the big blond dude is Chris something-or-other. The little guy, I don't know."

"Where are they, Chet? Where are they staying?"

"Just up the street, I think. It's an old place—they're on the second floor rear. The house is painted this puke-green color, you can't miss it. Besides, Chris has a bitchin' Beamer that's usually parked out front. Yo Stew, I'm gonna be sick!"

With that, Chet bolted for the bathroom. Julian was barely able to suppress his excitement. Backup had arrived and the EMTs were with the girl. He heard one of them refer to her as Julie. He saw his partner briefing the sergeant. They were waiting for the detectives now.

Julian made a decision. "Sarge, it looks like everything's secure, so I'm gonna take Frankie here and follow up a lead while it's hot. We'll sign out when we get there. Thanks, Sarge. Frankie, let's roll." Frankie knew his cue and took it. He was only steps behind Julian leaving the house.

They drove past the house once to make sure the BMW was there. The plates were registered to a Christopher R. Mallory according to the DMV computer lookup. Frankie parked the patrol unit in the alley behind the green house, a few houses down. They signed out, crossed through the backyard, and began to climb a set of rickety wooden outside stairs to the second floor.

Upon reaching the door, they hesitated. Julian's heart was beginning to thump a little too loudly. He glanced at Frankie. Frankie was ready.

Julian turned the doorknob very carefully to test the lock. It wasn't locked. He eased it open just a bit and knocked softly. No answer,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

no noise. He let the door swing completely open. He and Frankie each stood to one side of the doorway. They were looking through a kitchen and down a hall. One bathroom, one bedroom, Julian guessed. They stood at the threshold. No warrant, no probable cause. Perhaps an invite?

Julian sang out, "Yo Chris! You up?"

There was a pause. A groan?

"Wha—?"

Julian gave it another shot, louder. "Chris, whereya at? Are we in?"

The pause was shorter. The voice hoarse, unsure.

"Yeah. Who is it? What's up?"

Julian didn't miss his moment. He strode rapidly down the short hallway, glancing briefly into the bathroom before passing. He stopped short of the bedroom door, bent at the waist, and squinted between the door and frame. There was no ambush—only two young men sharing a bed. The larger of the two, Chris, nearest the door, was covering his head with a pillow, already returning to oblivion. Poor babies, thought Julian, they've had a difficult night.

"Wakey, wakey, boys!" he said.

With the two officers inside, there was very little room for maneuver. The furniture consisted of the bed, a chair in a corner, and a dresser with mirror pushed up against the passageway wall. The two patrolmen stood at the foot of the bed. Julian noted a doorway to his right leading to a set of fire-escape stairs. He also noted a series of photographs stuck between the dresser mirror and its frame. The camera, with flash bar, was hanging from a bedpost. One of the pictures in particular caught his attention.

"Mr. Mallory, wake up! We need to talk!"

Jeff sat straight up in bed, exposing his birdlike chest. His greasy black hair was standing at attention. Chris slowly drew a corner of the pillow from his face and one bloodshot eye peered out. He recognized the uniforms. One powerful, muscled arm came out from under the sheet and began groping along the floor at his side of the bed. Julian's right hand moved lightly to his revolver and rested. Mallory found his sweatpants and swung the lower half of his body out of the bed and into the pants in a single, graceful motion. Then he stood and pulled the pants to his waist in one move. This is a man who's used to being watched, thought Julian. A little quick about pulling on the pants, though.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Chris faced them full on now. He was a formidable creature. Jeff remained sitting in the bed with his knees drawn up to his chest.

Chris spoke in a quiet, dangerous tone. "Who the hell are you guys and what are you doing in my apartment?"

Julian needed to wrest control of the situation, fast. "First of all, we're the police. You've noticed the uniforms? Secondly, I asked if we could come in and you said yes. Now that we're through the formalities, I think we should talk. We should talk about you and your very close friend here."

He turned his gaze to Jeff. "You, I take it, are the family photographer. I couldn't help but notice that the camera is hung on your side of the bed. Are those some of your prize photos on the mirror there?"

Jeff almost squeaked in terror and reached out convulsively, grabbing Chris's huge forearm. Chris's reaction was immediate. He slapped Jeff's stringy arm away and bellowed, "Stay off me, you little faggot! And keep your mouth shut! You don't have to answer these clowns!"

That's good, thought Julian. They were coming unraveled already. "You two have frequented a number of parties lately," he said. "It seems that at several of these a girl was raped. Would you be aware of anything of that nature happening, Chris? Would you know this girl?"

He shoved the picture of Jennifer O'Hurley toward him.

Chris's face remained wooden. "I've never seen her before in my life."

Julian smiled. "That's a good line. Original. What about last night's party? Does the name Julie mean anything to either of you? Or did you bother asking?"

Jeff's lower lip was beginning to quiver. Chris's face was pale but remained impassive. "Nope," he said. "Don't know her."

Julian looked away from Chris and stared hard at the photo in the upper right corner of the mirror. He thought this photo had pride of place among the lineup of drunken, youthful faces lining the mirror. The other, more intimate snapshots would be hidden somewhere in this room. Chris and Jeff were trying hard not to look where Julian was staring so intently.

"Of course you know her—that's a picture of Julie right there."

Chris broke and ran, brushing past Julian like a locomotive, slamming him into the wall. He was out the fire exit before Julian could recover. Jeff took only a few moments longer to make for the door.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Using the top edge of the open door as a pivot, Julian swung both feet into his chest, setting him down hard. "Stay with him and radio for backup!" Julian shouted to Frankie as he raced down the fire stairs in pursuit.

Mallory had a start on him, but not a large one. Julian sprang from the bottom step just as he disappeared around the corner, heading for the street. It was only seven-thirty, but there were some signs of activity. Mallory shot into the street, heading east. Julian was hard on him and closing. A few people made catcalls from their decks and porches. The sun was a fireball over the ocean and they were heading directly for it.

Chris stepped on something sharp with his bare foot and stumbled. Julian slammed into him, grabbing a handful of hair with his left hand and his waistband with his right. He let himself collapse, knocking Mallory's legs out from under him, using his own bulk to drive him to the ground, chest first.

Mallory grunted and was still. Julian wasted no time in cuffing his hands behind his back. The handcuffs barely fit the massive wrists.

There were people everywhere now. Julian was hauling Mallory to his feet when he heard the laughter and hooting. Then he saw that he had broken Mallory's waistband. His sweatpants lay at his feet and he wasn't wearing underwear. The jeering was raucous now. Julian noticed more and more decks and balconies filling with young women.

Mallory pleaded, "Pull up my pants, please!"

Julian saw some watchers coming out with cameras.

"I'll kill you, you bastard!" cried Mallory.

Julian began to read him his rights. Slowly and by the book. First in English, then in Spanish.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a special reprint by

JEAN DARLING

On our cover this issue is a regular contributor whose life has been widely recorded. She was discovered on a California street one day by the wife of Hal Roach's assistant general manager, L. A. French, who recommended her for the cast of Our Gang. *She acted with the troupe not only in films but in vaudeville, touring the RKO-Orpheum Theater circuit through the early Thirties. ("Doing that for two years is a good school. You learn by doing something over and over again.") She returned to the Roach studios in 1934 to play Curly Locks in Laurel & Hardy's* Babes in Toyland *and appeared in Monogram's production of* Jane Eyre *with Virginia Bruce that same year.*

After graduating from Miss Long's Professional School in Hollywood, she was awarded a scholarship by the New York Municipal Opera Association and while still in her mid-teens took parts in Lee Shubert's Blossom Time, The Student Prince, Maytime, *and others. She later scored a major success as Carrie in the original cast of* Carousel. *She traveled on a lengthy U.S.O. tour during World War II and did extensive radio and television work back in the States after the war.*

In the Sixties she left the country again to travel with her husband, Reuben Bowen, whose stage name was Kajar the Magician. Jean began writing when she and their son Roy settled in Ireland in the Seventies. In Dublin, usually in the guise of "Aunt Poppy," she reads her stories to children—in person (sometimes at the Dublin Zoo) and on radio and recordings. Her published writing also includes memoirs of the Hollywood she knew, romance and fantasy fiction, and such well realized short mystery fiction as "I Never Saw His Face," which first appeared in the December 1982 issue of EQMM. Her first fiction, "Never To Be Lost Again," was published in our Department of Firsts in August 1975. (Who was it who first said, "Never say Never?" Wrong) . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I NEVER SAW HIS FACE

by JEAN DARLING

The large elegant marts on Dublin's fashionable South Side employed expensive security—closed-circuit TV, uniformed men on every door—but still the robbers struck, professional as well as amateur. Thieves were hitting the small unguarded markets, too, the inexpensive venues where stall-holders sold stamps, coins, medals, postcards—anything antique from buttons to jewelry. The wares were displayed in portable glass cases or beneath plastic sheets, at best frail protection against agile fingers or organized crime. Only the unpretentious Collector's Fair on the wrong side of the River Liffey had thus far managed to escape.

Even so, some of the less sanguine stall-holders kept easily reachable blackjacks under their tables, and one of the dealers in gold coins had started wearing a pistol tucked in his belt like a riverboat gambler in the Nineteenth Century. But middle-aged Mary Slattery, who presided at the second table on the left of the entrance, remained unarmed.

Every Saturday morning on the dot of ten she arrived with an attache case holding several thousand pounds' worth of stamps, both mint and used, arranged in see-through slots on black cards. These were lined up on a white tablecloth under the glow of two sixty-watt bulbs and covered with a length of transparent plastic. Three pair of stamp tongs, two magnifying glasses, and a swarm of small envelopes were then set out beside a green cashbox and at ten-fifteen exactly, Mary Slattery was open for business.

When her husband John was alive, they had both been regulars at the Collector's Fair just off O'Connell Street, Mary selling stamps at one end of the table, John valuing collections and buying in stock at the other.

Except for attending a half dozen or so important fairs like WIPA in Vienna and Philatelia in Frankfurt, Slattery curtailed his buying in of material to the Saturday/Sunday stall in Dublin. Mostly he

© 1982 by Jean Darling.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

purchased collections to be broken up into lots for the twice-yearly auctions he conducted by mail on a worldwide basis. The rest of his week generally flew by, every minute occupied in grading and describing stamps with such accuracy that far-flung collectors sent him bids with complete confidence.

Occasionally he took a day or two off to putter along the coast in his eighteen-foot cabin cruiser, the *Kathleen Bawn*. As Mary hated to set foot on anything that floated or flew, his little holidays had been solitary diversions until Liam was big enough to crew for him. And so the years had slipped by, the preparation of catalogues and the processing of orders leaving little or no time for the cultivation of friends. Nor did they have any children—unless Liam could be considered a son.

There had been black frost on the ground the night, seventeen years before, when John had presented the six-year-old waif to his wife—in much the same fashion as Earnshaw had sprung Heathcliff on his family. Sullen and dark, the child was every bit as unlovable as his literary counterpart, but to John he was the son he had never been able to have. Because of this, Mary accepted the child—albeit grudgingly.

In the beginning she had hoped Liam would take an interest in philately and eventually take some of the work off John's shoulders. But as the lad grew up, his interests on shore lay in outdrinking, outracing, and outwomanizing the unsavory gang with whom he spent his time. And John was no help, spoiling and cosseting him, granting his every wish—including the Honda the boy wanted for his eighteenth birthday.

While John was alive, the auctions were viable, even profitable. Then one evening he went over to Kelly's, the news agent at the corner, for cigarettes. A few minutes later Mrs. Kelly was pounding at the door.

"There was nobody in the shop and I happened to be watching John as he came across the street. I saw it all! The car hit him and raced on—didn't even slow down!"

As soon as the funeral was over, Liam sent out notices canceling the forthcoming auction, stapling them to invoices requesting immediate payment of all outstanding accounts. Mary was grateful for his help as long as he treated her with respect. But as time separated Liam from John's influence, he grew preoccupied and short-tempered. Then, one grey evening several months after John's death, the confrontation came.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"We've got to sell the house," Liam said without preamble, returning home and slumping unshaven into a kitchen chair. "I've thought it through. There's no other way except to sell and go away."

"Your meal's in the oven," Mary said, unable to hide her annoyance. "It'll be all dried out now, you're so late."

Liam removed the plate from the oven with a towel-wrapped hand and sat down again.

"Always the same, sausage and mash—always the same ever since Da died."

"You know I've no heart for cooking."

"I have a buyer. He'll pay cash."

"I don't know what you're on about, Liam. I've no intention of selling this house. The three-thousand insurance John left is a pittance these days, even with my widow's pension."

"If you sell the house, you'll have plenty to get by on. You can move to a warm climate. With your arthritis, you should jump at the idea."

"I'm not selling and that's that." Mary's voice was flat with finality.

Liam pushed his plate away, his face flushed. "Da left half of everything to me, so I have some say in the matter. I say we sell."

"Where does it say John left you anything? Where does it say? There was no will—even the thought of making a will drove him wild, you know that."

"Will or no, Da left me half!"

Mary was angry now, no longer able to mask the dislike she felt for the youth. "John took you off the streets from God knows where! He fed you, clothed you, and educated you as best he could, but there was no adoption—nothing legal!" Her mouth snapped shut. She didn't want to express her resentment at his intrusion into their marriage. An unnecessary intrusion, for she could have had a child. The memory of the back-street room where she had made her choice flashed in her mind. She had called the turn, so how could she blame Liam? She softened.

"Look, Liam, let's not fight. I've not thought of turning you out. This is your home as long as you wish to stay."

"How come, when there's 'nothing legal'?" His voice was tight.

"You can sell the boat for all I care, I never want to see it again, but shut your mouth about the house," she lashed out.

"I've had an offer for it—thirty thousand pounds, cash. —Look, you can have it all, but you've got to *sell!*" Liam shouted, all pretense

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of civility shattered. Mary looked at him, then without speaking she poured tea into her cup. She didn't see his hand draw back until it was too late to avoid the full force of the blow. "Can't you get it through your head? You've *got* to sell! There's no other way!" he stood for a moment looking down at her, then the door slammed and he was gone.

Automatically, Mary rose and cleared the table. What in the world am I going to do? she wondered. He was so big and strong he could kill her if he wanted to. Then he'd have everything—house, stamps, the lot—and there was no way she could stop him. Unless she went to the Garda Siochana. But the police never did anything until a crime was committed, they couldn't be expected to concern themselves with a middle-aged woman's fear.

She thought of the times she had warned Slattery about Liam and he had fallen back on the old saw "boys will be boys." But that didn't mean he shouldn't be neat in his dress, Mary had countered. It didn't mean he should cut school or, when he was older, not try to find a job.

"He has a job with me," John had said, adding, "Don't worry, everything's under control." Surely if Slattery had been in control Liam would have learned something about stamps. And what was this mysterious job? Crewing on the boat? And now, with his protector scarcely cold in his grave, the devoted foundling had turned on her like a rabid animal.

Mary examined her cheek in the hall mirror. Three thick stalks of red shone on the white flesh. Of course, she could give him half the stamps along with the *Kathleen Bawn*—half the stamps in number, not in value—then maybe he'd get off her back about the house. But if she did that and he left for good, her last earthly contact with her husband would be gone. She would be alone.

Perhaps she should try to make friends with him, forget her resentment and dislike. Perhaps it was the darkness of him that turned her off, his sallow skin and the heavy brows that met over his black eyes. He was so big and un-Irish looking. Perhaps that was it, Mary being "a pocket-sized cuddle of a colleen" according to her husband—an image she carefully guarded over the years so that Slattery would never feel the urge to stray. And he never had—he had adored her, his only criticism having been a comment he made the week he brought Liam into their home, that she had a failing she should look to—a tendency to judge a book by its cover. The failing,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of course, being his own, Mary thought then and now, in his lack of perception.

Even at fifty she was attractive, her hair still auburn and her face relatively unlined. Perhaps if she had been rounder, more the motherly type, the chasm between her and Liam wouldn't have existed. But now that Liam was every bit as alone as she was, past grievances should be forgotten, she thought, smoothing pale foundation carefully over the angry marks on her cheek. She dabbed her lashes with mascara, applied some lipstick, and studied her reflection. I'll change into the dark-blue-silk dress with the little white collar, she thought.

When she was satisfied that she looked presentable, Mary sat down to watch television until it was closing time at the pubs, at which time Liam usually came home. She hoped he wouldn't have taken too much drink, so that they could talk coolly about him joining her at the market. He didn't have to know anything about philately to sell stamps and collector's accessories. He could preside at her end of the table while she took on the responsibility of buying in stock so that the merchandise wouldn't dwindle away.

But Liam didn't come home that night, or the next—or the next. Then it was Saturday and she was sitting behind the table, second on the left of the entrance, at the Collector's Fair.

Business was slow and, as always happened when customers were few and far between, the stall-holders gravitated toward each other, posturing and showing off new treasures. They bargained together through the long dull afternoon. Three o'clock came, then four, then five, and it was time to start packing up for the day.

It was then the robbers appeared from nowhere.

There was no warning. Suddenly three men wearing balaclava helmets were in the room. Each one was over six feet tall and the one who led the way held a knife in his fist. "Nobody moves, nobody gets hurt," he said, his voice hoarse with menace, while the other two began scooping coins and jewelry into rucksacks. Jerry, the armed dealer in gold, who had been in the midst of the packing, edged behind the lid of his open case, his hand feeling for the gun. Mary screamed.

"Shut her up," the leader ordered and the man closest to Mary's stall moved to obey. He slid behind the table and, as he started to cover her mouth, the breath caught in her throat and she slipped to the floor.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He bent over her. "Stay quiet and you won't be hurt," he whispered in a voice soft as the mists of Killarney. "Sure it's only a ski mask. Don't be afraid. Here, I'll help you slide under the table where it's safe."

"What do you care if I'm safe? You'll be taking my stamps no matter what," Mary said—but she let him shove her under the table.

"You remind me of my sainted aunt," he said and was gone in answer to his leader's shout to hurry and clear her table. Then all hell broke loose.

Jerry, having reached his gun, fired point-blank at the man systematically bagging his gold, and the man, clutching his shoulder, dropped the bulging sack. Coins splashed across the floor.

The antiques salesman jumped at the leader and received the knife blade between his ribs. As in a motion-picture dream sequence, all sense of reality was gone—people began to shout, to kneel at the victims' sides on the coin-spangled rug. Sirens wailed to a stop and a Garda patrolman fished Mary out from under the table and turned her over to a paramedic in the ambulance outside. The men had escaped with the heavy cloth bags.

After a night at the Meath Hospital, Mary was allowed to go home—to a house still empty of Liam. She had checked out all the rooms and dispiritedly put the kettle on when the front bell rang. She looked through the spy hole. A uniformed man was at the door and another was coming up the walk. A squad car was parked at the curb. "Yes?" Mary said, not unchaining the door until the sergeant showed his identification.

"We brought your case," he said as she led the way to the kitchen. On seeing it, Mary felt a pang. It would be the first Sunday in fifteen years that she was not at the Collector's Fair. But then, she realized, neither would be anyone else.

The antiques salesman, the sergeant—named Fallon—told her, was resting comfortably, the knife having missed any vital organ. The thief Jerry had winged was on the way to Bridewell, where he would be invited to assist the police with their investigations. The other two men were still at large and none of the stolen goods had been recovered.

"This is my partner, Michael Sheehey," Sergeant Fallon said. "He'll be taking down your statement."

Over tea and buttered soda bread, Mary answered their questions, but all she was able to add to the testimony of other witnesses was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the exchange between her and the man who had helped her under the table. When pressed, she admitted he was tall. "But they were all tall and wearing those things over their faces," she said.

"Surely you can recall some detail about—"

"All I remember is him saying I reminded him of his sainted aunt."

"Can you describe his voice?"

"He was whispering. You can't tell anything from a whisper."

"Whispering wouldn't hide an accent. Could you say if he was a Dublin man? Cork? Donegal?"

As Mary was trying to recall, the back door opened and Liam walked in. "Ah, Liam, it's you," she said, and introduced him to the policemen.

Fallon explained what had happened.

"Look," Liam said, "can't all this wait until she's had a bit of rest? She looks very tired to me."

"Perhaps you're right, Mr. McCann," Fallon said. The patrolman closed his notebook and the two men rose to leave. "Your mother will probably be called upon to come down to Pearse Street Station to help us identify—"

"If you catch anyone to identify," Liam interrupted.

"You're right, Mr. McCann, but you never know your luck," Fallon said, studying him, noting the foreign appearance so unlike that of the woman. "Well, good day to you. Feel better, Mrs. Slattery."

"Are you hungry?" Mary asked.

Liam sat at the uncleared table and shook his head. "No, I'm not hungry."

Mary sat opposite him. "So where have you been since—"

"I'm sorry, Mary," he said, reaching across the table and touching her arm.

"About what?" Mary asked, looking at his hand. He removed it.

"Losing my temper—slapping you. I know I was wrong to think you'd sell the house just like that."

"You know perfectly well I'll never leave Dublin. I never have and I'm too old to emigrate now."

Liam looked at her for a long time. "You say you've never left Dublin. What about the trip you made to London?"

Mary flushed and mentally riffled through past lies. At last she selected the simple denial.

"In March 1957 you spent the better part of a day in a second-floor flat on Longacre Street by Covent Garden Market. You were so ill your friend Maureen was worried she would be implicated if

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you died, so she put you in a cab." His eyes held hers. "The driver took you to a small theatrical hotel off Tottenham Court Road and you stayed there until you were well enough to come home."

Though stunned that he knew, Mary held to her denial that she had ever been out of Ireland.

"Had you not left Ireland, John would've had a proper son and I wouldn't be here," Liam said. "In 1958 Da was hired to catalogue a private collection of Irish and British Commonwealth stamps for a Belgian—"

"That's not true. John never stayed away overnight until he got the *Kathleen Bawn*," Mary denied, firm in her belief that a lie well stuck to is as good as the truth.

"He stayed near the Guild Square at the Hotel Fabiola—he sent you that postcard you have framed on the bedroom wall. The copy of Bruegel's painting of the Square made four or five hundred years ago. You know as well as I do the only reason he took the job in Antwerp was because of your trip to London. The thing he wanted most in the world was a family, and after finding out about—well, he needed time away."

"Who was it spread the lies about me?"

"Maureen Hennessy, the same one who put you in the cab. One night she had too much to drink and came over to Da in the pub."

"On her mother's grave she swore never to tell." Mary spoke so softly Liam had to strain to hear her. Then she looked up. "All right, I admit it. So what? It's all over and done."

"No, Mary, it's not over and done. That's what I'm trying to tell you." He rose and prowled the narrow kitchen. "Da stayed in Antwerp for seven weeks and during that time he became involved with a Palestinian girl who worked at the Fabiola. I am the result of that involvement."

"You lie! John never would—"

"When I was six years old, my mother died of leukemia and Da brought me here."

"Now I know you're lying! John never went to Antwerp again!"

"He didn't have to. My uncle brought me to Dublin."

"Why are you telling me all this? Are you trying to destroy my memory of him?"

"You need never have known any of this if—"

"If what? If I'm after selling the house? That's it, of course. You want my house. Well, you're not going to get it. I was born in this house, and I'm going to die in this house!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You're right about that," he murmured.

"Well, now that we have that settled, why don't you go back to your pub friends and leave me alone?"

"Don't think I don't wish I could, but I promised Da I'd take care of you."

"You? Take care of me? That's a laugh! You've never spent two minutes in the same room with me if you could help it."

"When I was small, I tried, but you couldn't stand the look of me." Liam sat back down and rubbed a hand over his face. "This is getting us nowhere. Please listen. When I was fourteen, Da got a phone call from my Uncle Omar. He said the people he worked for needed a way to get merchandise past Irish customs. With that in view, a Sunday sailor—a midsea rendezvous—would solve their problem. As questions could arise if Da bought a boat, it was arranged that the *Kathleen Bawn* would come to him as a bequest from a non-existent relative residing in Holland at the time of his death—"

A thud sounded in the hall, quickly followed by the clank of metal on metal.

"I wonder what that can be. There's no post at this hour," Mary said. Liam went to investigate.

A moment later he returned, holding a folded newspaper with an envelope scotchtaped to one side. He pulled the letter free and lay the paper flat on the table.

DUBLIN SOLICITOR'S SECRETARY MURDERED was splashed across the top third of the front page. Below, a pretty girl smiled above the caption: Nuala Connolly, secretary to Carlton Browne of J. Robinson and Co., Solicitors, was found dead early this morning by a cleaning woman.

The article went on to say the girl had suffered a severe blow to the head as well as bruises on the arms and legs. Mr. Browne had been contacted at his holiday home on Teneriffe and was returning to take inventory of the open safe.

Mary pushed the paper to one side. Liam looked at her, wondering how she could be so cold. He sighed and handed her the envelope. "Here. Read it. Da wrote it—maybe you'll believe *him*."

He watched the conflicting emotions flicker across her face as she recognized the small neat handwriting that covered several pages in close lines.

"It's John's handwriting." She glanced up. "It would *seem* to be John's handwriting," she amended, as a thought struck her. "Your name—McCann. It's on the birth certificate." Her voice was trium-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

phant. At last she had one fact to prove the rest of what he said were lies.

"Da looked through records at a number of parish houses until he found a child who was born the same day I was. As the boy was dead, my using his birth certificate as identification presented no problems. It was easy enough to write to the Customs House enclosing a postal order requesting a copy of the required paper. Go on—read the letter."

She obeyed, turning the pages slowly and eventually looking up at him.

"It would seem that what you say is true," she grudged. "You are his son." Suddenly her eyes brimmed and Liam wondered if it was in sorrow that he was Slattery's son or if it was because of all the lost years.

Sniffing, Mary felt in the pockets of her cardigan. "I need a tissue," she said, "I must be catching cold."

Without moving out of his chair, Liam plucked one from a drawer in the wall cabinet. She accepted it without a word of thanks and patting at her nose she resumed reading the letter.

"What else was there to do? I agreed to Omar's plan or I broke Mary's heart. So after the boat arrived at Dun Laoghaire, Liam and I became weekend sailors. Years passed without a word from Omar and I thought he had forgotten all about us. Then he telephoned from Germany. He said his superiors were transferring their activities to Ireland. From then on, we rendezvoused regularly with one ship or another who put a man on board to exchange the *Kathleen Bawn*'s two life preservers for another pair."

As she read, Mary's heart squeezed tight. Without wanting to know more but unable to stop herself, she read how Slattery had been cautioned against touching the life preservers. Of course, he thought them filled with cash in exchange for narcotics. But he didn't touch them until one day the *Kathleen Bawn* ran into a squall and the starboard preserver came loose. In resecuring it, Slattery found it weighed a ton. Examination showed it was filled with bagged gold coins and jewelry. Putting two and two together, it was obvious to him that he was being used by terrorists. The check for two hundred pounds that came through the letter slot each month paid for the *Kathleen Bawn*'s aid in financing the purchase of arms to further their cause.

From then on, the letter said, Slattery always checked the contents of the life preservers. When they carried cash, which they often did

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from one of the bank raids that were epidemic of late, he removed a thousand or so. In the letter he told how Liam had been used as a driver of the getaway car, sometimes using the Honda to escape with the boodle. He told how the Collector's Markets had become fair game, most of the merchandise being unidentifiable except for an exceptionally rare specimen of stamp or coin.

Halfway down on the last page there was a quote from the *Philatelic Exporter* citing the upsurge of theft in the coin-and-stamp world, naming a German stamp dealer who had been killed during one such robbery.

"Here at the end John says he's leaving this letter with his solicitor to be posted in case anything happened to him. So why—?" Mary looked up from the letter.

"The solicitor, Carlton Browne—" Liam indicated the newspaper on the table "—was in Teneriffe on holiday. He always goes away for six weeks at Eastertime. That's why the letter wasn't sent to the police."

"But why was it put through our letter slot?"

"So we'd know that Da's insurance policy has lapsed and we're next on the list. You wondered why I stayed away after the other afternoon? I had to find out why the letter hadn't reached the Garda Siochana. Da never told me the solicitor's name in case one of Uncle Omar's friends tried to force it out of me." Liam's mouth stretched in a mirthless grin. "But in spite of all the precautions he was killed."

"If they'd known about the letter, they wouldn't have killed him," Mary protested. "It doesn't make sense!"

"I guess Paddy didn't know about the letter. When they found out that Da was making off with some of their cash, he went off half cocked and ran him down. He's a pretty hot-headed lad, Paddy is."

"You know this Paddy?"

"I do—and so do you. He's the nice boy who pushed you under the table during the robbery at the Collector's Fair."

"I don't believe you."

"Ah, Mary, you never know a book by its cover—or a man's heart by his voice. Paddy's a nice boy in his way—my best friend, I suppose—but that doesn't mean he's not going to kill us. He's the muscle man for Uncle Omar's group. There are four here in Ireland, two Palestinians and two Irish lads who are converted to their cause.

"Paddy must have followed me on the rounds of solicitors' offices. I had to know why the letter hadn't reached the police. When I finally discovered Carlton Browne was Da's solicitor, I stopped look-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing." Liam's eyes were sad as he touched the newspaper. "A bad mistake. She was a fine honest girl, Nuala Connolly. She admitted Slattery was one of Browne's clients but insisted she knew nothing about any letter. As you see, Paddy had no trouble getting it. I only hope he didn't hurt her too much before she died."

"*That's* why you said I should sell the house?" Mary whispered.

"And so at last the penny drops. A little late, though." It was Liam's turn to be hard and bitter. "If you had agreed, I would have faked a phone call to a solicitor putting the house up for sale, then we could have hightailed it out of the country. In a month or so I would have had the money, thirty thousand pounds, transferred to your name in a bank in whatever city we found ourselves. Da deposited over sixty thousand pounds in our names—bit by bit, he posted the money to Switzerland." He folded the newspaper closed in despair.

"Can't we leave now?"

"We can try," Liam said, but his tone didn't hold out much hope.

"I'll just throw some things in a bag—" Mary started up from the table.

Liam rose and took her firmly by the elbow. "Come with me," he said. He led the way along the narrow hall to the front door.

"Look through the spy hole," he told her. "You see the red Toyota across the street?"

Mary saw it.

"The man sitting at the wheel is your nice young man Paddy."

"How do I know that? I never saw his face. That could be anyone sitting out there."

"You'll just have to take my word for it. Now let's get the hell out the back way. We might have a chance."

Mary didn't move. Her jaw was set and her mouth tight in the stubborn line Liam knew so well.

"It's a trick of yours to get the house," Mary said, sliding back the bolt. "Why should I believe you? I'm going out and talk to him. If it's him I'll recognize his voice." She took off the chain.

"No, Mary!" Liam cried.

Mary turned the knob and stepped outside—and all her doubts were erased as the world shattered in a blast of light and sound. And in that split second she knew beyond all doubt that Liam was right—about Paddy, about John, about herself, and everything.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* Ben Snow story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

"Kate says you think the world is about to end."

"The world as we know it, yes," Harry told Ben. "Martha and I believe we will all be transported to another plain."

"Why did you choose tomorrow? Is there something mystical about the year nineteen hundred?"

"My wife had a dream—a vision, if you will—and what she saw made sense to us. We will not live to see the next century. This earth will not survive to see it."

"A hundred years from now, people will be saying the same thing as the year two thousand approaches," Kate told him . . .

THE EDGE OF THE YEAR 1900

by EDWARD D. HOCH

In later years people would sometimes ask Ben Snow where he'd been at the turn of the century, at the exact moment when the year 1900 began. He'd given up trying to explain that the Twentieth Century didn't really begin until 1901, and he'd answer the question: "At midnight on December 31, 1899, I was standing on the edge of a cliff in Arizona, waiting for the world to end."

He was forty-one years old at the time and it would be one of his last adventures in the Far West before he headed East the following year.

It was twilight when Ben Snow urged his horse Oats up the final steep incline to the top of the mesa, giving him a spectacular view

© 1991 by Edward D. Hoch.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the setting sun reflected off the drifting white clouds on the western horizon. He'd seen the sight perhaps a thousand times over the years, but it never failed to stir him. Oats was more interested in the vegetation growing along the top of the mesa than in the view and was munching with his head down when something struck Ben in the fleshy part of his left arm. It was like an insect bite, but he looked down to see a slim feather-tipped dart protruding from his shirt. With a reflex action born of years on the trail, he pulled the dart free and rolled out of the saddle, landing on his feet on the far side of the horse so that Oats' protective bulk was between him and his unseen assailant.

His Colt was out of its holster when a woman's voice called out, "Throw down your gun! I don't want to kill your horse!"

"Show yourself and we'll talk about it!" Ben replied, shifting the six-shooter to his left hand while he attempted to remove the dart from his arm. But his left hand refused to grip the pistol butt and it fell to the ground. He bent to retrieve it, but his whole body was growing numb and he found himself down on his side.

From the ground he saw a young woman in blue jeans and a red checked shirt emerge from behind a rock and walk warily toward him. In one hand she carried a three-foot-long tube that was the blowgun through which she'd fired the dart. Ben lay perfectly still, trying to fight the growing numbness in his body and marshal what little strength remained. She hesitated some six feet from him, as if to be sure he was unconscious, then stepped around Oats and started to lean over him.

Ben's right hand shot out, grabbing her boot and pulling her off balance. She hit the ground hard at his side, the blowgun dislodged from her grip. "Don't move!" he ordered, grabbing for his fallen revolver. "I'm not dead yet."

She took a deep breath. "I can see that. I wasn't trying to kill you. I was out hunting—the amount of poison on that dart was barely enough for a prairie dog."

Ben got shakily to his feet, trying to act stronger than he felt. "Get up," he ordered, covering her with the gun. She could have been no older than twenty-five, with dark hair worn to her shoulders and a slim waist fastened with a wide leather belt. Her face was pretty with high cheekbones and brown eyes. "What's your name?"

"You're the intruder here," she answered. "What's yours?"

"Ben Snow. I—" He leaned on Oats, unable to shake off the weakness.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm Kate Memorie. You'd better come and let me fix you up."

"Come where?"

"To the pueblo ruins at the foot of the mesa. That's where we're staying until the end."

"What end?"

"Come on—" she came over to him "—I'll help you onto your horse. It's not far down the trail."

She led Oats by his reins while Ben managed to stay in the saddle. He was aware they were descending a steep path, but he took note of very little until they reached the bottom of the valley and he heard the rushing waters of the river. He opened his eyes again and looked up at the great cliff with its vertical dark streaks that seemed to have been painted on in some distant past. "What's this place?" he asked, staring at the dozens of terraced adobe dwellings at the base.

"The Canyon del Muerto. These pueblo structures were abandoned long ago."

But there were people here now—men, women, and children coming out to meet them as they might have met an early hunter returning with a bear or mountain lion over her saddle. A grey-haired man hurried up to them and asked, "Who is this, Kate? Why did you bring him here?"

"I shot him with my blowgun. I thought he was a Pinkerton looking for us. His wound needs treating."

"My God, Kate," a woman moaned, "you'll bring the marshal down on us."

Ben's first thought was that he'd stumbled onto a den of outlaws. Perhaps they were highwaymen who ambushed weary travelers, or even train robbers who hid out here between forays to the north. But even in his weakened condition he knew there was something wrong with that picture. Whatever they were, these people weren't thieves.

The young woman named Kate helped him inside one of the pueblos that had easy access from ground level. "You can rest here until the drug wears off," she told him.

"You use poisoned darts?"

"Only for sport, not for food." She was busy with the wound in his arm, tearing away the sleeve of his shirt and bathing it with a soothing lotion made from the juice of some spiky leaves. "I was so startled to see you at the top of the mesa that I thought you must

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be spying on the Pueblos. The Pinkertons have been trying to find one of our party, Captain Zachary."

"What's he done?"

"That's no concern of yours." She bound the wound. "The lotion will draw out the poison. You'll be good as new by tomorrow. Able to celebrate New Year's Eve."

"New Year's Eve?" Ben had been on the trail since Christmas and the date had slipped his mind.

"This is Saturday, the thirtieth. A new century begins on Monday—or at midnight tomorrow, to be exact."

The outside light was blocked for a moment as a large man appeared at the doorway of the pueblo. "Is this our visitor?" he asked Kate.

"Yes, but there's no danger. He's not a Pinkerton man."

The other man entered and Ben noticed he was wearing the tall black boots of an Army cavalry officer. "How do you know?" he demanded, moving closer to Ben.

"There's no badge or identification," she said, "and Pinkertons don't wear their six-shooters like gunfighters. He says his name is Ben Snow."

The man bent lower until Ben could see his face. There was a few days' growth of beard and his red-rimmed eyes seemed to have lost an intensity they might once have had. "I'm Captain Zachary," he said. "Late of the U.S. Cavalry."

"I'm pleased to meet you," Ben managed, propping himself up to accept a handshake. "This is quite a community you have."

"It's not mine. These people belong to Harry and Martha."

"Who are they?"

Kate answered. "The grey-haired couple I talked with when we arrived."

"How can the people belong to them?"

"Harry and Martha have a religious community here. At least it's been here for the past month or so. They've gathered here to wait."

"For what?" Ben asked.

"The end of the world. They believe it will come at midnight tomorrow."

Kate persuaded Ben to spend the night at the pueblo before continuing his journey. He didn't take much urging. The long trip on horseback had been more wearing for him than it had been ten or

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

twenty years earlier, and being shot with a poisoned dart hadn't helped.

"Where are you headed?" she asked, arranging a pallet for him. "Mexico?"

"San Antonio, Texas. I have to see some men about a job."

"You've got a long way to go."

"I gather you think I'll make it. You don't think the world is going to end tomorrow night?"

"No," she replied with a little laugh.

"Then what are you doing here?"

"I came with Thad—Captain Zachary."

"With the Pinkertons on your trail? What for?"

"I'd rather not talk about that. It's Thad's story, not mine."

"But you're not members of Harry and Martha's group. You don't believe the world's going to end tomorrow."

She smiled slightly. "I think we've got a little longer than that."

"Where'd you learn to use a blowgun?"

"Thad taught me. He's been in South America and the Indians down there use them. The poison they use can kill a man quickly."

"The captain seems to have had quite a life. Where'd you meet him?"

"In California," she answered vaguely. "There—your pallet's all ready for later. Come on outside and enjoy the evening air. There's nowhere else in the country has better weather in late December than the Arizona Territory."

She was probably right, Ben decided, taking in the cooling breeze that swept up the valley with the coming of darkness. Here and there torches burned outside the pueblos, and he could see children on the roofs of some, climbing up and down the ladders that were the only means of access to many of them.

A white-haired figure approached them in the dark and it took Ben a moment to recognize the man who had berated Kate when they arrived. "Are you feeling better?" he asked Ben. "My name is Harry Wayne."

Ben shook hands and introduced himself. These people were friendly enough, more friendly than those he often encountered in small trail towns. "I understand this is something of a religious community," he said.

"Not any standard religion. We're just a group of families preparing ourselves for the second coming of the Lord. The great judgment day the Bible tells us about."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Kate says you think the world is about to end."

Harry glanced at her. "The world as we have known it, yes. Martha and I believe we will all be transported to another plain." Though he was probably in his sixties, his voice was firm and unwavering. He spoke like a believer.

"Why did you choose tomorrow? Is there something mystical about the year nineteen hundred?"

"My wife had a dream—a vision, if you will—and what she saw made sense to many of us. We will not live to see the next century. This earth will not survive to see it."

"A hundred years from now people will be saying the same thing as the year two thousand approaches," Kate told him.

"Perhaps. We will learn soon enough which of us is right."

"How many do you have here in your colony?" Ben asked.

"One hundred and ten, counting children and babes in arms. We chose this place because of the abandoned pueblos. They would not be suitable for any long period of time, but to gather everyone together in one spot for a month they are perfect."

"What will you do if the world doesn't end tomorrow? Go back home?"

"We would not be here if we did not have faith."

"You mean every one of these people really believes the end has come?"

"Oh, a few left during the month, and there's a friend of Martha's who came along strictly to be with her. Amanda's no believer. The rest of us are, though. Everyone except Amanda, the captain, and Kate here."

Off in the distance someone had started a campfire and a group was singing an old spiritual. Ben had little doubt they were prepared for the end of the world. More prepared, certainly, than he was.

He slept well on the pallet, though shortly after dawn he was awakened by the sounds of children playing. They were up early, taking advantage of this day they believed would be their last. Ben sat up and found he felt well enough to think about going for a swim in the river. He washed his face in a basin of water and looked out the door of the pueblo to see two women standing near Oats, admiring him. He recognized one of them as Martha Wayne. He finished dressing and walked out to greet them.

"Good morning, ladies," he said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The younger of the women turned to him. "Is this your horse? He's a beauty."

Ben nodded. "His name is Oats. He's carried me back and forth across the West for a good many years."

"I'm Amanda Burjolt, a friend of Martha's." She was about Ben's age, with a stunning face and figure and a ready smile.

He returned her smile. "I understand you're another nonbeliever."

"About the end of the world? Well, yes." She gave Martha a little hug. "We've been through a lot together and we'll get through this."

On the roof of a nearby pueblo Captain Zachary had appeared, yawning as he took a watch from his pocket and checked the time. "How long has the captain been here?" Ben asked.

"Too long," Martha said. "He's an unsettling influence."

"How so?"

But she had no time to answer. Zachary came down one of the rough-hewn ladders and started toward them. "Everyone's up early for the end of the world," he said.

The women greeted him and walked on, leaving him with Ben. "You riding on today, Snow?" he asked.

"I should, but I'm tempted to stay another night to see what happens."

"That might not be wise," Zachary said. "There'll be a lot of disillusioned people here tonight. They might turn on their leader, or they might turn on nonbelievers like ourselves."

"Then you and Kate will be leaving today?"

Zachary hesitated, kicking a bit of river mud from his boots. "That's difficult to say. Kate sometimes has her own agenda."

"Have you been together long?"

"Together? I don't know what you're implying, Mr. Snow."

"She blew a poisoned dart into my arm to protect you. Isn't that enough to imply you're more than casual traveling companions?"

"Zachary!"

The sound of his name was sudden, shouted, and he whirled around. His hand went instinctively for the gun he wasn't wearing, but then he seemed to relax when he saw the sandy-haired young man crouched by the river's edge some twenty feet behind them. "You again, Tommy? Hasn't this foolishness gone far enough?"

But it obviously hadn't for Tommy. He had a hunting knife in his right hand, held in a fighting stance, as if daring Captain Zachary to come after him. The former cavalry officer reached into his pocket

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and carefully removed his watch, handing it to Ben. "Would you hold this for me, please?"

Ben turned the heavy gold watch over in his hand and saw that it was inscribed on the back. *For TTZ my comrade in arms TR.*

Captain Zachary had moved deliberately forward, inviting an attack from the young man with the knife. They came together at the water's edge, and Zachary's boots splashed among the stones and silt of the shallow river. He grabbed for Tommy's knife arm and yanked forward. The sandy-haired youth gave a yell and dropped the knife, and both of them tumbled into the water. It was already obvious that the brief battle was all but over. Zachary grabbed Tommy by his hair and dunked his face into the cold water. Then he stood up, retrieved the fallen knife, and hurled it far downstream into the river.

"Next time I won't be so easy on you," he told the youth.

Ben gave him back his watch and observed Martha and her friend Amanda come running down from the pueblos to help Tommy. "Who's that boy?" Ben asked the captain.

"Harry and Martha's son. Tommy Wayne."

"Why's he after you?"

"I guess he wants to settle an old score before the world ends tonight. He thinks he knows something about me."

"Does it have anything to do with your fighting in Cuba last year with Teddy Roosevelt and the Rough Riders?"

Zachary's eyebrows went up. "Who told you that?"

"No one. It's on the back of your watch."

"This inscription? Yeah, Teddy gave me the watch. How'd you know?"

"The giver used three initials for you and only two for himself, which seemed odd. But I remember reading a newspaper article about Teddy Roosevelt last January when he took office as governor of New York. It mentioned the fact that he had no middle name or initial. There may be a lot of TRs around, but not too many without a middle initial. Also, of course, you're a retired cavalry officer, and Teddy's Rough Riders were made up of cowboys and some cavalrymen."

"You're smart, Mr. Snow. Most of the cowhands I know would be hard-pressed to read a newspaper. Yeah, I fought with Teddy. Saw him just a few months ago when he came West for a Rough Riders reunion. You should have seen the crowds of people. He's a national

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hero since the war. Some say he's got a chance to run for Vice President on the Republican ticket next year."

"What's it have to do with Tommy Wayne?" Ben asked.

"The day Kate and I found this place I had a little run-in with him. I mentioned being with the Rough Riders and he claimed we were all phonies, said we didn't even have horses."

"Is that true?"

"Well, most of the horses got left back in Florida, but that didn't matter. We didn't need horses to charge up San Juan Hill."

"Were you an officer in the regular Army?"

"First United States Volunteer Cavalry. We were a mixed lot, I'll admit—Indians, cowpunchers, stage drivers, miners, trappers. Teddy hated the name Rough Riders at first, but it stuck."

"Which were you?" Captain Zachary didn't look like any cowpoke Ben had ever seen.

It took Zachary a moment to respond. Then he said, very quietly, "I was a Pinkerton man."

"Oh?"

"Before the war, a few years ago. That's how I got a commission in the Volunteer Cavalry. They were still doing some strikebreaking then—miners, railroad workers."

"Skullbreaking," Ben corrected.

"That, too. They're trying to change their image now. That kid Tommy was one of the strikers at a mine up in Utah. He remembered me right away and came after me. Just now wasn't the first time. Hell, what did you want me to do—stand still and take a hunting knife between the ribs?"

"Had you worked him over in Utah?"

"Him and a buddy of his, I guess. I don't even remember now. That was in a different life."

"Not for him."

"No."

"What'll you do if he comes after you again?"

Captain Zachary shrugged. "Shoot him, I suppose."

Shortly after noon, Ben saw Kate out once more with her blowgun. "Any luck today?" he called to her.

"No strangers on horseback. I did get myself a lizard or two, though." She came down the trail to join him. "How's the arm?"

"I'll live." Ben suppressed a comment on her strange pastime. "I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had a talk with Captain Zachary this morning after the Waynes' son went after him with a knife."

"Tommy. He's given us trouble from the first day. He claims he remembers Thad from someplace in Utah."

"Thad told me about it, about his Pinkerton days and the Rough Riders. I saw the watch Teddy Roosevelt gave him."

"He's very proud of that."

"Where did you meet?" Ben asked.

"In San Francisco, after the war."

"If he worked for the Pinkertons, why are they after him now?"

"They say he killed a man during the strikebreaking. As if no one else ever did!"

"That's why you came to the Arizona Territory rather than one of the states," Ben guessed. "He figured he'd be safer from extradition here."

"Something like that," she admitted.

"You said he'd been in South America."

"That was for the Pinkertons. A bank embezzler escaped there on a tramp steamer and Thad went after him. I told him he should write a book about his experiences. Allan Pinkerton himself wrote several."

"But if he's a fugitive—"

"That's only a technicality. The Pinkertons want to capture him just to make themselves look good."

The children of the commune were singing and dancing along the river's edge. It seemed to be a celebration of life and, happy though it was, it made Ben sad. He knew the world wouldn't end at midnight and he wondered what would happen to all these people then. Captain Zachary was walking among them, patting the heads of the smaller tots, deep in conversation with Martha's friend, Amanda Burjolt.

"He has a way with children," Ben commented.

Kate followed his gaze. "With women, too."

"Are you staying up till midnight?" he asked.

She smiled. "I wouldn't miss it. Do you think I'm going to sleep through the end of the world?"

And yet as midnight approached, Ben couldn't find her in the darkness that engulfed the pueblos. Harry and Martha Wayne had taken their position at the head of their congregation, and by the flickering torchlight he could see Tommy at their side by the river's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

edge, as if the river itself had somehow become the flow of time that was about to cease.

Ben was standing talking with Captain Zachary when Amanda Burjolt joined them. "Do you want to watch from the top of the cliff?" she suggested. "If anything does happen we could see it best from there."

She started up the path with the captain, but Ben lingered behind, searching for Kate. Finally he caught sight of her in the torchlight. She seemed to be looking for something and he went to intercept her. "What's the trouble?"

"Someone's taken my blowgun. I can't find it anywhere."

"I'm sure it'll turn up in the morning. Come on up on the cliff with us."

"Who's there?"

"The nonbelievers—Captain Zachary and Amanda."

"I'll be up shortly. I'd really like to find that blowgun," she said querulously.

Amanda and Zachary were standing near the edge of the sloping cliff some fifty feet above the others by the water's edge. Ben couldn't see them in the dark and had to be guided by their voices. "I found Kate," he said. "She'll be up soon." As he went and stood between them, Zachary struck a match and consulted his watch. "She'd better hurry. Only ten minutes until the end of the world."

Down below, by the flickering torchlight, it was impossible to pick out individual figures. All had merged into a chanting mass that gradually fell silent as the time approached.

"How will we know when it's midnight if nothing's going to happen?" Amanda asked.

"I'll check my watch," Zachary said. "It's right here in my hand."

"Where is our leader?" someone shouted from below. "Guide us!"

The chanting was resuming as they grew restless. By the feeble torchlight, Ben saw a few of them throw themselves into the shallow water of the river. He was aware of Amanda's breathing next to him.

"It *must* be midnight by now," she said after a moment.

As if to confirm the fact, the chanting below them died. Then Harry Wayne's voice split the silence. "Wait, wait! It *must* be the end! I *know* it must!"

Beside Ben, Amanda suddenly asked, "Where's the captain?"

"Isn't he next to me?" Ben reached for him and felt nothing but air. "Captain Zachary!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Do you have a match?" Amanda asked.

Ben lit one and saw Zachary lying at his feet, one hand clutched to the back of his neck. Ben knelt and held the match closer, seeing the feathered dart embedded there. "I think he's dead," he told Amanda. "Yell down for help. We need men with torches."

Harry Wayne and his son were among the first to reach them. "What happened!" Harry said.

"He's dead. He's been murdered."

"Then midnight was the end of the world for him," Tommy Wayne said.

But Ben had picked up the engraved watch from the ground at the cliff's edge. The glass was broken and the hands frozen in position. "No," he said, holding it up for them to see. "He must have dropped the watch when the dart struck him. He died at four minutes before midnight."

Somewhere in the midst of the confusion that followed, Kate Memorie reappeared. "What happened?" she asked, and then saw Zachary's body by the light of the torches. She ran to him. "Thad! Oh my God, Thad!"

"He's dead, Kate," Ben said. "There's nothing you can do."

"That's one of my darts!"

"It looks like it," Ben agreed. "Where's your blowgun?"

"I still haven't found it!" she told him.

The Waynes' followers carried the body down to the river, and it was decided someone would have to go for the marshal in the morning. The killing of Captain Zachary, strangely enough, seemed to have erased their disappointment—or delight—that the world was still in one piece. There were no shouts of "Happy New Year," but neither were there any tears of disappointment. They had come here and the world hadn't ended. That was all.

Ben slept restlessly that night, aware of the unnatural silence around him. Even with the first rays of sun there was none of the singing and playing he'd heard from the children on the previous day. The Twentieth Century had dawned—quietly. Tommy Wayne and one of the other young men saddled up their horses and rode for help. There had been some discussion of whether they should take the body with them, but it was decided that the marshal would want to examine the scene of the crime.

After they'd gone, Ben found Martha Wayne seated alone by the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

river. She looked up at him and smiled sadly. "It's been a terrible night, hasn't it?"

"At least the world is still here. There's hope in that."

"I suppose so. It's just that Harry and I were so certain—"

"Where are all these people from?" Ben asked her.

"Mostly up around Provo where we lived. Many of them are relatives or neighbors who believed in us. Amanda, for instance, became our friend after her husband was killed. Like many of the others she gave up her home to come down here with us. Now it's another year and life goes on."

"Not for Captain Zachary."

"No," she agreed. "Not for him. But Harry and I still look like a couple of old fools."

"Do you have any idea who might have killed Zachary?"

"None at all. Perhaps some Indian sneaked up on him in the dark."

"I doubt that. He seems to have been killed with Kate's blowgun. That's not a weapon North American Indians use. They haven't been around here, anyway, have they?"

"No," she admitted. "But I can't believe it was one of us."

"Were you with your husband and son during that whole time before midnight?"

"It was so dark down there I couldn't tell where anyone was. Tommy's torch went out shortly before twelve and he went off to get a light from someone else. I think Harry and I became separated in the dark."

Ben stared up at the walls of the canyon. "It was dark where we were, too. In fact, I wonder how the killer could have seen Zachary well enough to get an accurate shot at him with the blowgun."

She glanced at him sharply. "What do you mean?"

"I don't know," he answered vaguely. "It was just a thought."

He wandered off in search of Kate Memorie, and found her finally in the pueblo with Zachary's body. Though the air was cooler here, flies were already buzzing around, attracted by the odor of death.

"I was just cleaning him up a bit," Kate said. "There's nothing more I can do for him."

Ben nodded. "The marshal should be here before long. What about your blowgun?"

"I found it and my supply of darts in one of the unused pueblos. The poison was there, too, in paste form. I usually dilute it before applying it to the darts, but the killer must have used it full strength."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Kate, there's something that's bothering me about Zachary's death last night. Up on that cliff, away from the meager torchlight, it was pitch-dark. Zachary lit one match, but that was minutes before he died. The three of us were standing there, naturally shifting position. How could the killer have been so accurate?"

"From your voices?" she suggested.

"That would have given our general location only."

"What are you getting at, Mr. Snow?"

"The killing of Thad Zachary might have been a mistake. Perhaps he wasn't the intended victim."

"Do you think I tried shooting another dart into you?" she asked, her eyes moist.

"Not me. Amanda Burjolt."

"What?"

"Amanda and Zachary were becoming friendly. Perhaps you tried to kill her out of jealousy."

"That's ridiculous."

"She's a handsome woman, Kate."

"We weren't staying here forever. Thad planned to move on next week."

"But that might have changed when the world didn't end. Perhaps Amanda would have felt less of an obligation to remain with the Waynes."

Kate shook her head. "If you're playing detective, you've got over a hundred other suspects here. What about Tommy Wayne?"

"I don't believe there are more than a few real suspects," Ben told her. "Does anyone else know you found the blowgun?"

"Only you."

"Keep it that way, and leave it right where you found it along with the darts and poison—"

He was interrupted by shouts in the distance, and they saw four horsemen riding along the river toward them. Tommy and the other youth were in the lead, followed by the marshal and his deputy. As they grew closer, Ben could see the morning sun reflecting off their badges.

The marshal walked with a bit of a limp from a gun battle in Tombstone a decade earlier. His name was Bill Clements. Ben had heard his name many times but they'd never met before.

"Ben Snow, eh?" Clements repeated, eyeing Ben suspiciously. "The one some people took for Billy the Kid?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"That's in the past. Those days are over."

"Legends die hard." The marshal rubbed at his bristly chin.

"Captain Zachary was something of a legend and he's as dead as they come," Ben reminded him.

The marshal nodded. "The Pinkertons been looking for him. They'll be glad to get the news. He was a born killer. The Army was the best place for him." He squinted his eyes at Ben and added, "Maybe it took another killer to bring him down."

"Not me, Marshal. One of the women and I were standing with him by the cliff up there when he got it. The killer had to be some distance behind us with that blowgun."

"Will the woman testify to that?"

"I will," Amanda Burjolt said, coming forward to join them. Her face looked fresh and rested. "There's no way Mr. Snow could have fired that dart, Marshal."

"In the dark—"

"We were talking the entire time. He was standing there by my side and Zachary was on his other side."

"Yet you weren't aware when he fell?" Clements asked Ben.

"Not at once. There was singing and chanting from below. I heard no sound from him. Then, right at midnight, Amanda noticed he wasn't there. I lit a match and saw him on the ground. His watch was broken at four minutes to twelve."

"That might have been faked."

"All I can tell you is it had the right time earlier and the killer could hardly have come up and adjusted the hands in the dark."

"All right," Clements said with a sigh. "I guess it's important that we find that blowgun. Let's have a look at the body."

Harry and Martha Wayne had come up to join the marshal, and they all went off to view Zachary's remains. Ben managed to hang back and then headed off toward the pueblo where Kate told him she'd found the blowgun. It was a long shot, he knew, waiting for the killer to return for something already discarded, but this wouldn't be the first time he'd taken a gamble and won.

There was no ladder or ground-level doorway in the pueblo she'd indicated and Ben had to climb in through a window opening. He found the blowgun at once, wrapped in an old piece of cloth. The package of darts and vial of poison were with it. Judging by his own wound, Ben knew the poison in its concentrated form would have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

weakened and paralyzed Zachary before he knew what was happening. He would have felt nothing more than an insect bite.

Ben thought about that as he waited in the darkest shadows of the pueblo. After he'd been there an hour, he was beginning to grow discouraged when a face suddenly appeared at the window. He waited until she was inside and reaching for the blowgun before he spoke. "You knew right where to find it, didn't you, Amanda?"

Startled, she turned toward him. "I've been helping to search for it," she said.

"I can even take a guess at your motive," Ben told her.

She held her ground. "Are you forgetting I was standing right next to both of you when he was shot from behind with this blowgun?"

"That was my mistake and your shrewdness. Zachary wasn't shot with the blowgun. You had the poisoned dart concealed, probably in your handkerchief. As we stood there in the darkness, you simply crossed behind my back and stuck him in the neck with it."

For a moment she didn't respond, and Ben wasn't certain what effect his words had on her. Then she said simply, "Do you really think you know why I did it?"

"A guess, as I said. You and the Waynes came down here from Utah. Zachary killed a striker there, a friend of Tommy's, before he joined the Rough Riders, while he was with the Pinkertons. I know your husband was killed. Was it Zachary who did it?"

She nodded. "I didn't think I'd ever see his face again, but I recognized him as soon as he rode up with Kate Memorie. And I knew I had to kill him. Kate supplied the weapon, with her silly blowgun and poisoned darts. I stole them all yesterday and hid them in here, even though I didn't need the blowgun itself. I thought it was foolproof. Did you really know it was me or were you merely waiting here to see who showed up?"

"I had a pretty good idea," Ben said. "You wanted to strengthen the idea that the blowgun was used, so you wanted it found along with the darts and poison. You didn't think anyone had found it here, so I guessed you might remove it to a more public hiding place. As for knowing it was you, I think it was Zachary's watch that tipped me off more than anything else."

"His watch?"

Ben nodded. "What we have here are more than one hundred believers—people who honestly thought the world would end last

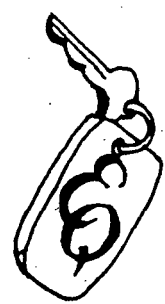
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

midnight. Would any of them have bothered to commit a murder at four minutes to twelve? Harry Wayne and his wife Martha and even their troublesome son Tommy would have waited until after midnight, at the very least. There was plenty of time to kill Zachary if the world didn't end. That goes for all their followers, too. It stood to reason that the only person who would kill Zachary before midnight was one of the nonbelievers, to whom the midnight deadline meant nothing. There were only three of us, besides Zachary himself—myself, you, and Kate. I knew I hadn't done it, and the more I thought about it the surer I became of Kate's innocence. Would she have used the only weapon in the place traceable to herself? And even if she did, how could she have seen well enough in the dark to hit Zachary? For a time I even considered the possibility she was aiming at you in some sort of jealous rage and hit him by mistake. But she never would have risked it—she would at least have waited until someone lit a match again. Once I'd narrowed it down to you, I saw at once how you'd done it—not with the blowgun but simply with your hand."

She only nodded, and asked, "What now? Will you give me a chance to ride away and start a new life?"

"Only a jury can give you that chance. You'll be heading back with Marshal Clements."

Later, as Ben rode out of the Canyon del Muerto, he saw Harry and Martha gathering their followers for the trek back to Utah. He decided they'd be all right, even with their disappointment. He'd be all right, too. The wound in his arm was healing. A new century was beginning, and life was going on.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CLASSIFIED MARKET

ELLERY QUEEN—published 13 times a year. CLASSIFIED AD rate is $3.20 per word—payable in advance—($48.00 minimum). Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional. To be

ADDITIONAL INCOME

GET PAID FOR READING BOOKS! $50-$100 per book. Write: Calco Publishing (Dept. C-50), 500 South Broad, Meriden, CT 06450.

"HOW-TO" books for extra income. For FREE information write to: GJ Barbarino, 24 Thompson St., Port Jervis, NY 12771.

AUTHOR'S SERVICE

LOOKING for a publisher? Learn how you can have your book published, promoted, distributed. Send for free booklet. HP-5, Vantage Press, 516 W. 34th St., New York, NY 10001.

AUTOMOBILES & MIDGET CARS

IS It True. . .Jeeps for $44 Through the U.S. Gov't? Call For Facts! 504-649-5745 Ext. S-760.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS

FREE LIST! Used Hardcover mystery and detective fiction. Dunn's Mysteries, Box 2544, Meriden, CT 06450.

WORLD'S largest mystery stock. Search Service. Free catalogues. Limited Editions. Aardvarks Book Detectives, P.O. Box 585070, Orlando, FL 32858.

FREE CATALOG. Used hardback mystery, crime and detective books. Steve Powell, Dept. DP, The Hideaway, Bar Harbor, ME 04609.

FREE LIST! Used Mystery, detective and Thriller fiction. Marshall Snow, 292 Providence Rd., So. Grafton, MA 01560.

VINTAGE Mysteries—Free Catalogue! Good, Inexpensive, Recycled Detective Fiction. Grave Matters, Box 32192-A, Cincinnati, Ohio 45232.

100,000 science fiction and mystery paperbacks, magazines, hardcovers. Free catalogs! Pandora's, Box Z-54, Neche, ND 58265-0133.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

Bargain Books

Publishers' overstocks, remainders, imports—over 3,000 titles at up to 80% savings in our **FREE CATALOG!** Biography, History, Art, Nature, Gardening, Cooking, Fiction—something for everyone, including about 600 new titles monthly. Write:
Hamilton Box 15-715, Falls Village CT 06031

ANNOTATED lists of new mysteries. Also used mystery catalog. Rue Morgue, 946 Pearl, Boulder, CO 80302. Order any in-print mystery: 1-800-356-5586.

SEND 25¢ for Large Listing of Mystery and Detective Books. Canford, Drawer 216E, Freeville, NY 13068.

FREE BOOKPLATE featuring Sherlock Holmes. Free catalog of personalized bookplates in five other classic styles to protect and beautify your library, also bookends, posters, etc. Doray Collection, 1622 Central St., Evanston, IL 60201.

PAST issues of Ellery Queen magazines available. Send for free list and prices. APB Magazines, P.O. Box 214997, Sacramento, CA 95821.

PUBLISH YOUR BOOK! Join our successful authors. All subjects invited. Publicity, advertising, beautiful books. Send for fact-filled booklet and free manuscript report. Carlton Press, Dept. SMN, 11 West 32 Street, New York 10001.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

STAY HOME! MAKE MONEY ADDRESSING ENVELOPES. VALUABLE GENUINE OFFER. 20¢. Write Lindco, 3636-DA Peterson Ave., Chicago, IL 60559.

GOOD MONEY! Weekly! Processing Mail! Free Supplies, Postage! Bonuses! Start Immediately! Rush stamped envelope! Foodmaster-MDC, Burnt Hills, NY 12027-9983.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

included in the next issue please send order and remittance to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

3-D Camera distributorship available. Start-up for $70.00. Dennis or Pam, mornings: 714-944-3117, evenings: 714-941-2233 or leave message.

GET PAID for taking easy snapshots! No Exp. Call 1-900-230-3636 ($0.99/min) or Write: PASE -DD3, 161 Lincolnway, North Aurora, IL 60542.

BIG PROFITS with best-selling products. $5.00 for catalog, refundable on first order. Linda Morgan, 51 Tooker Avenue, Dept. IO-120, Oyster Bay, NY 11771.

LEARN HOW TO RECYCLE PRECIOUS METALS. For full Details on How To Buy, Prepare and Where to Sell, Send $20.00 for this important guide to: Jon Dallmann, POB 1584, Chattanooga, Tennessee 37401.

NEW! GROW EXPENSIVE PLANTS. SELL FOR 2,000% PROFIT. FREE information. GROWBIZ, Box 306-I1, Seminary, MS 39479.

BUY IT WHOLESALE

400,000 BARGAINS Below Wholesale! Many Free! Liquidations . . . Closeouts . . . Job Lots . . . Single Samples. Free Details. Worldwide Bargainhunters, Box 1409-IO, Holland MI 49422.

EARN MONEY selling rings, jewelry, buckles, watches—buy direct. 130% below retail. Catalog $1.00 (refundable). Anka-N, 90 Greenwich Ave., Warwick, RI 02886.

COMPUTERS & SOFTWARE

THE GAME'S AFOOT! Computer Games for the Armchair Detective. Murders in country houses, mean streets and exotic settings await your solution! Please send SASE to: Pikes Peak Adventures, Inc., 100 East Kelley Rd., Woodland Park, CO 80863.

EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

WITCHCRAFT Occult Miracle Power Secrets. Gavin and Yvonne Frost. Now accepting students. 1502-AN, New Bern, NC 28563.

EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION—Cont'd

HIGH SCHOOL AT HOME, diploma awarded. Low tuition. Our 92nd year. Phone free anytime. 1-800-228-5600, or write American School, Dept. #388, 850 E. 58th St., Chicago, IL 60637.

FOR INVENTORS

PROFITABLE IDEA? Market that Idea! *Patenting *Research *Marketing. Call The Concept Network for your Free Kit. 1-800-835-2246 Ext. 197.

HELP WANTED

EARN TOP PAY PROCESSING MAIL AT HOME. Details $2 + SASE: Pierce, Box 9672, Brea, California 92622-9672.

JOB SEARCHING SURE FIRE TECHNIQUES! Get the JOB YOU WANT. $12.00 to: 3-819 Cynthia St., Saskatoon, Sask. S7L 6C2.

INVENTIONS WANTED

INVENTORS! Your first step is important. For FREE advice, call ADVANCED PATENT SERVICES, Washington, DC. 1-800-458-0352.

PROTECT, PATENT AND DEVELOP, Your invention rights before sale. Registered Patent Agent and Licensed Professional Engineer. Send for FREE PATENT INFORMATION Every Inventor Should Have. Richard L. Miller, 12 Parkside Drive, Suite-I, Dix Hills, NY 11746. (516) 499-4343.

INVENTIONS MARKETED. Cash, Royalties. FREE INVENTION PROTECTION CERTIFICATES, GEORGE SPECTOR, Manufacturers Representative, Dept. O, Woolworth Building, New York, NY 10007.

MAILING LISTS

NEW NAMES! Compare our guarantee! Fast delivery! Computerized labels! DCO: 1-800-992-9405. Visa/MC/AmEx.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MAILORDER OPPORTUNITIES

RESEARCH PROVEN YTEM that brings money to your mailbox. Sase to: M. Clayton, RR #1, Plymouth, IL 62367.

MISCELLANEOUS

POETRY CONTEST—$1000 Grand Prize! $11,000 total prize value! Potential publication. Send one poem, 20 lines maximum, any subject, any style to: American Poetry Association, Dept. EQ-15, 250-A Potrero St., P.O. Box 1803, Santa Cruz, CA 95061. Free brochure! Deadline: December 31.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

GOOD MONEY! Weekly! Prosessing Mail! Free Supplies, Postage! Bonuses! Start Immediately! Rush stamped envelope! Foodmaster-DCM, Burnt Hills, NY 12027-9983.

READ "How To Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Instructive booklet tells how to write an effective Classified Ad. Also includes certificate worth $5.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publications. For your copy, send $3.75 (includes postage) to: Davis Publications, Inc., Dept. CL, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

$2000 Monthly Possible, Assembling Products. Write: Or Call Amazing Recording 908-506-0600, Homeworker, POBX 5348-DP, Toms River, NJ 08753.

$50.00, $100.00, $1,000.00 Weekly! Mailing Letters. Send Six 25¢ Stamps. Bloom, Box 5938, Richardson, Texas 75083.

HOMEWORKERS NEEDED! TOP PAY! These words can mean FRAUD! Profitable homework is possible, but don't get taken! FREE REPORT! Send long SASE to: Consumer Network, Dept.-4, Box 8135, St. Paul, MN 55108.

ULTIMATE Opportunity. Become Financially Independent. Working Full or Part Time. Call 24 Hour Recorded Message (212) 330-0470. It could Change Your Life Forever!

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

"ULTIMATE" HOME BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY - Earn Hundreds a Day! $2. Sase: Chelco, P.O. Box 711, Brielle, NJ 08730.

PROS CLOSELY GUARDED SECRETS! Mailorder Bookselling Revealed. Free Details. Premium, Box 1621-A2, Spring, TX 77383.

"A NO-NONSENSE WAY TO 500 A DAY!" $1 + SASE: ABSOLUTE SUCCESS UNLIMITED, P.O. Box 710891, San Diego 92111.

MAKE $500 STUFFING 500 ENVELOPES. Postage/supplies furnished. Free Details. Gemini, Box 215-IO, Brooklyn, NY 11204.

THIS IS A FIRST. Make them the star of their very own personalized book or poster. 32 laminated pages in color. Her picture appears on 23 pages. Representatives wanted for personal, route, mail-order, fund-raising, chain store sales. Jeff Roberts Company, 299 Newport Avenue (S8), Wollaston, MA 02170.

$1,000s WEEKLY possible processing mail! Start immediately! FREE supplies/postage! Rush stamped envelope! MLC, Box 3559-ZM, Danbury, CT 06813.

AMAZING Home Based Business OPPORTUNITY! REVOLUTIONARY Marketing Concept! UNBELIEVABLE Lifetime Earnings! Requires No Inventory! No Minimum Purchase! No Direct Selling! Minimum Risk! Strong Company Support and Training! Free info. Call (702) 385-5756.

SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY! GUARANTEED MONEYMAKER! Call: 1-(900)-321-4100, Extension 17. $2.00/minute.

CASH Generating Mailorder Info. Send $1 plus Sase: Green 151 Bishop Ave., M304, Secane, PA 19018.

CONFIDENTIAL REMAILING, Receiving, Forwarding. Free Details. United Remailers, Box 36, Dept. M3, Woodland, CA 95695. Agents Wanted. Request Agent Information.

YOU'LL MAKE MONEY

SAVE MONEY TOO— BY READING and ANSWERING THESE CLASSIFIED ADS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

UNUSUAL HOME BUSINESS! GET PAID FOR SOMETHING YOU ALREADY DO—MAKE EVEN MORE GETTING PAID FOR SOMETHING OTHERS ALREADY DO. AMAZING RECORDED MESSAGE REVEALS DETAILS: 301-637-5972 DEPT. 128.

100 BEST Spare Time Business Opportunities in America! 256 Pages, $25.95 PPD: Jim Williams, Box 7474, DJ-1, Springfield, IL 62791-7474.

PERSONAL

SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Refined, sincere people. 18-80. Identity, Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

ORIENTAL ladies seeking correspondence, marriage. Presentations by American husband, Filipina wife. Asian Experience, Box 1214T, Novato, CA 94948. (415) 897-2742.

BEAUTIFUL GIRLS SEEK FRIENDSHIP AND MARRIAGE. American—Mexican—Philippine—European. Photo selection FREE! Latins, Box 1716-DD,Chula Vista, CA 92012.

BEAUTIFUL ENGLISH SPEAKING Filipinas want men of all ages as Life Partners. Videos available: PAL, 51 Blanca, CO 81123-0051. 1-900-860-3033. $3.00/per minute. Adults.

MEET Beautiful Women! We supply photos, names, addresses! Send for Free Details! Merit, Box 74758-AE, Los Angeles, CA 90004.

PERSONAL—Cont'd

ASIAN WOMEN desire friendship, marriage! Free details, photos! SUNSHINE INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE, Box 5500-HF, Kailua-Kona, Hawaii 96745. (808) 325-7707.

BEAUTIFUL BRITISH LADIES & ELIGIBLE GENTLEMEN seek American ladies & gentlemen for Friendship/Romance/Marriage! Free details: English Rose Agency, 2nd Floor, Mill Lane House, Mill Lane, Margate, Kent, England. Tel: 01144-843-290735.

MEET USA singles by direct phone/mail. M. Fischer Club, Box 2152-V, Loves Park, IL 61130.

SONGWRITERS

POEMS WANTED. Songs recorded and published. Radio-TV promotions. Broadway Music Productions, Box 7438-DA, Sarasota, FL 33578.

TAPES & CASSETTES

OLDTIME radio programs. Mysteries, adventure, suspense, science fiction, comedies. Classic tapes. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Heritage Farm, New Freedom, PA 17349.

TRAVEL

SAVE money! Detailed info including toll-free numbers for budget motels, car rentals, airlines, etc. $2.00 SSAE to: Chandler, Box 576, New York, NY 10028.

For Greater Savings...Results...and Profits...

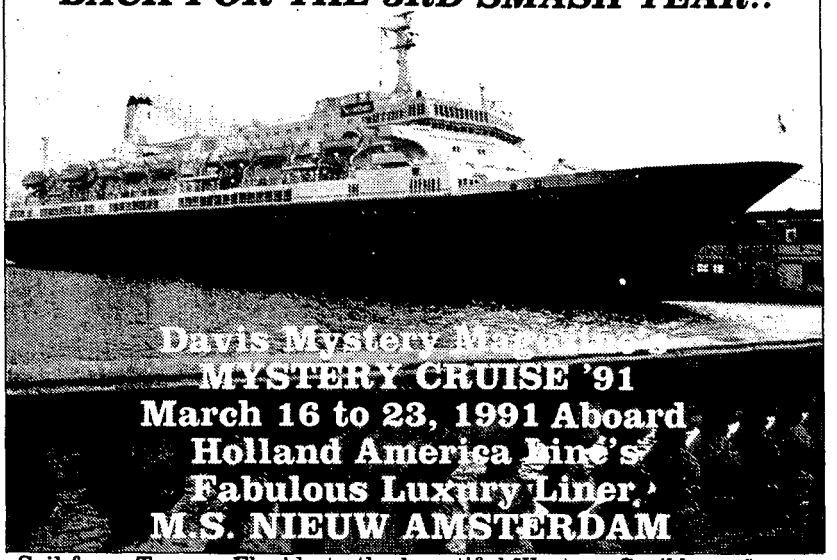
PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR SPECIAL COMBINATIONS:
Combo #1, Combo #2, or Combo #3.

Each combination is designed to give your ad the largest audience available.

Each combination offers you a Special Discount Rate.
For further information write to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BACK FOR THE 3RD SMASH YEAR!!



Sail from Tampa, Florida to the beautiful Western Caribbean for an exciting sun-and fun filled week. Enjoy the very best that luxury cruising offers, *PLUS* many special Mystery Cruise events. There will be an On-Board Mystery created just for Mystery Cruise participants, *plus* special guests including Eleanor Sullivan, Editor of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, and, by popular demand, guest author George Baxt. Trivia Contests, private parties, great gifts and prizes, and *lots* of surprises!

When not enjoying all the ship-board activities or the Mystery fun you'll have a great time in the wonderful ports of call which include: colorful Key West, Florida; Cozumel, Mexico; Ocho Rios, Jamaica; and Georgetown, Grand Cayman.

Prices for Mystery Cruise include round-trip air fare and start at $1209 per person, double occupancy from most major cities. There is limited availability in some accommodation categories. First come, first served.

BOOK EARLY . . . SPACE IS LIMITED . . . PAYMENT PLAN IS AVAILABLE.

To be part of this fabulous week and to receive all the special amenities, you must book your cruise through:

OMNI GROUP CRUISES, INC.
6513 Hollywood Blvd. Ste. 205, Hollywood, CA 90028
Write or call for more information (800) 876-OMNI

Please send me more information about Mystery Cruise '91

Name _____
(please print)

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone ( ) _____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEXT — EQMM's 50th ANNIVERSARY ISSUE!

19 stories—15 *NEW*—by

JOHN le CARRE **ELLERY QUEEN**
ISAAC ASIMOV **CLARK HOWARD**
JAMES POWELL **NELL LAMBURN**
PHYLLIS DILLER **ROBERT TWOHY**
NICHOLAS BLAKE **EDWARD D. HOCH**

and others

plus a biography of FREDERIC DANNAY

ELEANOR SULLIVAN ..... *Editor*
RUSSELL ATWOOD ..... *Managing Editor*
TERRI CZECZKO ..... *Art Director*
RON KULINER ..... *Associate Art Director*
CAROLE DIXON ..... *Production Director*
DENNIS JONES ..... *Newsstand Operations Manager*
ELIZABETH BEATTY ..... *Circulation Director*
CYNTHIA MANSON .... *Director of Marketing & Subsidiary Rights*
CHRIS DORBANDT ... *Newsstand Marketing & Promotions Manager*
CONNIE SCARBOROUGH *Contracts Manager*
VEENA RAGHAVAN ..... *Director Special Projects*
IRENE BOZOKI *Classified Advertising Manager*
A. BRUCE CHATTERTON *Advertising Director*
JUDY DORMAN ..... *Advertising Services*

Advertising Sales Office

NEW YORK
212-557-9100

JOEL DAVIS
President and Publisher

JOE DeFALCO
Vice President, Treasurer

CARL BARTEE
Vice President, Manufacturing

MARY TZIMOKAS
Vice President, Circulation

ELLERY QUEEN
Editor-in-Chief
(1941–1982)

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. Vol. 97, No. 2, Whole No. 579, February 1991. Published every 28 days with special issues in March and October by Davis Publications, Inc., at $2.25 a copy in the U.S.A., $2.75 in Canada. 1 year subscription $31.97 in U.S.A. and possessions, $37.50 elsewhere, payable in advance and in U.S. funds. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 380 Lexington Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10168. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to Ellery Queen, P.O. Box 7052, Red Oak, Iowa 51591. Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y. and at additional mailing offices. Canadian third-class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario.

© 1991 Davis Publications, Inc., all rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention. ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE® is the registered trademark of Ellery Queen.

Printed in U.S.A. Submission must be accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelope. The Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. POSTMASTER: Send Change of Address to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 7052, Red Oak, IA 51591. In Canada return to 1801 South Cameron, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3E1. ISSN: 0013-6328. For back issues, send $3.50 to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 40, Vernon, NJ 07462.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MAIL ★ ORDER ★ MALL

▼ CUTLERY: A CUT ABOVE THE REST

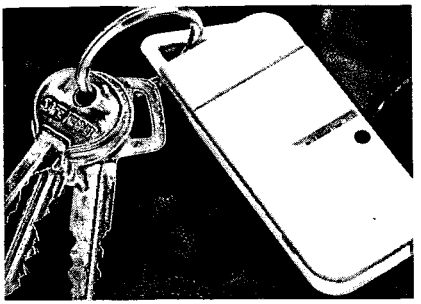
The secret behind Regent Scheffield's new Laser 2000's cutlery is the unique machined edge guaranteed to stay super sharp for 25 years — without sharpening! The result is a knife so sharp and durable that it comes with an unmatched guarantee: If a Laser 2000 knife ever dulls, chips, rusts, or breaks during the next 25 years, Regent Sheffield will replace it FREE! Plus, the Laser 2000's blades have a unique nonstick Xylan coating, so slicing even hard vegetables is a snap. And clean-up is a cinch because food doesn't stick to the blades. Unbreakable, dishwasher-safe handles are contoured to fit your hand comfortably. A lovely sleek wood block holds the entire 5 piece set: bread knife, carving knife, cook's knife, utility knife, and paring knife. **$129.98** ($7.00) #A1933.

▼ THE MAGICAL SPARE BED

It's almost like pulling an extra bed out of a hat. Unlike most spare beds that gobble up storage space and are unwieldy to move, this one rolls down to fit a 36"-long, 3"-diameter canvas case, to stash in a closet corner, car trunk, camper, anywhere. Yet it unrolls in minutes to a full-size 27" x 73" bed that will even accommodate 6-footers, supports up to 500 pounds and is comfortable to boot. The secret's in the inventive construction: a cotton canvas sling is supported on laminated steel legs with 6 steel springs for cushioning and stability on rough ground. Toss the carrying strap over your shoulder and go — camping, beach, poolside; the 10" legs keep it off damp ground and sand. Of course, this bed is indispensable at home, country home, dorm — even for kids in motel rooms. A superb value at **$61.98** ($12.25) #A1931.

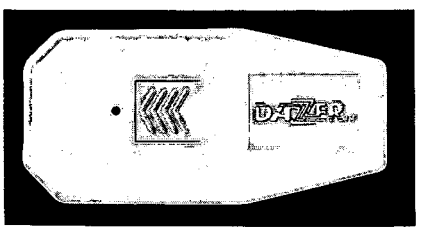
DOWNLOADED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

▼ EASY KEY FINDER



Keys are misplaced more often than any other modern essential. Now thanks to our easy key finder your keys can tell you where you put them. Clap your hands 4 times and it will chirp electronically. Works up to 30' away. Special hybrid microchip design requires no on/off switch (other units need you to turn them ON before you lose your keys). This unit has a high-impact plastic case; weighs a mere ½oz; comes with its own key ring; measures only 2½"x1 1/8"x3/8". Batteries and a 30-day manufacturer's warranty are included. **$13.98** ($3.00) #A1889; two units, **$23.98** ($4.00) #A1890.

▼ HELPFUL TO HUMANS HARMLESS TO DOGS



Even the most dedicated canine afficionado can sometimes encounter unfriendly dogs. Dazer™ provides a humane way to repel their advance, emitting ultrasonic sound waves inaudible to humans and totally safe for dogs (unlike mace and other common deterrents). Pocket size (4¾" long) plastic case can also clip on belt; takes 1-9V battery, included. For joggers, hikers, bikers, seniors and kids—plus the proverbial postman. **$29.98**, ($3.00) #A1829X.

▼ YES, IT DOES WINDOWS — IN HALF THE TIME

Do we exaggerate? Actually, it may take *less* than half the time you'd normally spend assembling, toting and juggling bottles or buckets, rags, a hose, a stepstool. Spray & Wipe™ combines in one implement an ample reservoir for your cleaning fluid, a spray trigger at the base and adjustable mist-to-spray head at top, plus a squeegee. At 34" long, it eliminates much climbing; is lightweight but sturdy for firm leverage on the squeegee; swivel head reaches angles. Think patio doors, shower stalls, boats, campers, windshields, et al. **$15.98** ($4.00) #A1865X.

HOW TO ORDER

CALL TOLL FREE, 24 HOURS A DAY, 7 DAYS A WEEK

1-800-365-8493

CUSTOMER SERVICE CALL 201-367-2900

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

30 Day Money Back Guarantee For Exchange or Refund

WE ACCEPT MASTERCARD/VISA

If ordering by mail send remittance to **MAIL ORDER MALL**, Dept.021 EL P.O. Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701. Item price is followed by shipping and handling in ( ). Be sure to add both together to arrive at total price. N.J. residents add 6% sales tax. When using credit card — include account number, exp. date, signature. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign or C.O.D. orders.

Magalog Marketing Group Inc. © 1989

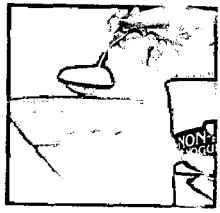
1905 Swarthmore Ave., Lakewood, N.J. 08701

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

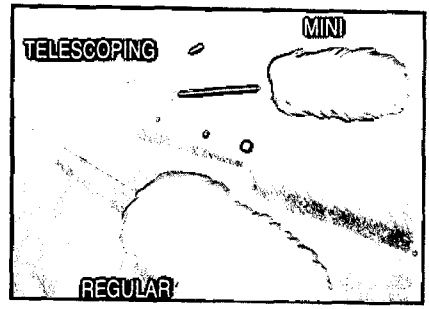
MAIL ★ ORDER ★ MAIL

∇ YOGURT CHEESE FUNNEL & RECIPE BOOK

In less than a minute, you can make the newest, healthiest most economical spread — just spoon plain yogurt into this woven plastic funnel, place in the frig, in 8-14 hrs. you have really creamy cheese. Using 1½% milkfat yogurt, it has 90% less fat, ⅔ calories but over twice the calcium of commercial cream cheese. Yet most people including avowed yogurt haters can't tell the difference! Use the 142 page recipe book included or substitute for cream cheese, mayonnaise, or sour cream in your favorite recipes. Funnel holds up to 16oz. Makes about 8oz. of yogurt cheese. Our set provides 142 page recipe book, 1 funnel, you'll have enough for the lemon cheesecake shown above — scrumptious and a mere 125 calories. **$26.98** ($5.00) #A1892.

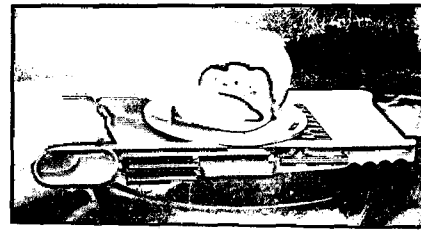


∇ DUST MAGNETS



Lambswool contains a natural static charge that makes dust literally leap off surfaces. Our dusters are imported from England. They are the fluffiest, highest quality lambswool in the world! We offer a set of four lambswool dusters: our 27" duster, our telescoping duster which extends to more than four feet — lets you reach high corners, top shelves, overhead lights and collapses to 28", and two mini dusters for extra fragile objects. **$22.98** ($4.00) #A1870.

∇ GOOD NATURED GRATER



The Leifheit 4-in-1 grater is a sure-grip food holder that lets you work at top speed with no fear of flaying your fingers. Molded hand-grip gives sure control, indentations seat the grater securely atop bowls from 4½" to 9½" diameter. Blades are stainless steel, store right in grater frame, and provide choice of small and large shredders, medium grater, and ground-edge slicer. The unit itself is made of tough ABS plastic, dishwasher safe. Imported from West Germany. It's the first truly civilized grater we've seen. **$22.98** ($4.25) #A1910.

HOW TO ORDER

CALL TOLL FREE, 24 HOURS A DAY, 7 DAYS A WEEK

1-800-365-8493

CUSTOMER SERVICE CALL 201-367-2900

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

30 Day Money Back Guarantee For Exchange or Refund

WE ACCEPT MASTERCARD/VISA

If ordering by mail send remittance to **MAIL ORDER MALL**, Dept.021 EL P.O. Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701. Item price is followed by shipping and handling in ( ). Be sure to add both together to arrive at total price. N.J. residents add 6% sales tax. When using credit card — include account number, exp. date, signature. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign or C.O.D. orders.

Magalog Marketing Group Inc. © 1989

1905 Swarthmore Ave., Lakewood, N.J. 08701

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED